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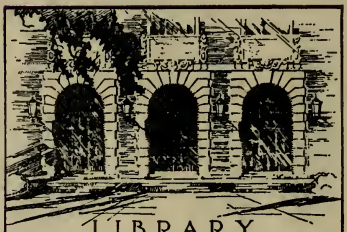

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MR. WARRENNE,

THE MEDICAL PRACTITIONER.

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THE MEDICAL PRACTITIONER.

A NOVEL.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "CONSTANCE D'OYLEY,"
"MARGARET CAPEL," &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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MR. WARRENNE,

THE MEDICAL PRACTITIONER.

CHAPTER I.

Phi.—They do lie—
Lie grossly! that say Love is blind; by him
And heaven they lie—he has a sight can pierce
Through ivory as clear as it were horn,
And reach his object.—*Love's Pilgrimage.*

Although the kindness of Mrs. Digby would at once have absolved Leonard from his duties at Mr. Thomason's, he sent in a qualified resignation; for he was anxious not to put to any inconvenience a gentleman who had received

him when he needed employment. Perhaps he carried to greater lengths than most young men in his situation that fine sense of justice which the poet has recorded to be the best definition of *honour;* for he was satisfied to name no time for his withdrawing from his duties, but went on contentedly, week after week, until Mr. Thomason should select a suitable person to fill his place.

But with what altered feelings did he pursue his monotonous labours, and how patiently did he encounter the unnumbered vulgarities of his companions, while his mind reverted to the stately ruins of Rome, and the deep sunshine of the Greek Isles.

Mr. Mills welcomed him back with an oath, and heard the news of his resignation with equally strong expressions of discontent. He knew by experience that it would not be easy to find a clerk who would do so much more than his own share of the work, and keep his temper into the bargain.

Mr. Courtenay's reception of him was very friendly; and the clerks could hardly restrain their astonishment at the sight of the musical gentleman condescending to talk familiarly to one of themselves. But Courtenay, who never seemed aware of the presence of his inferiors, went on addressing him exactly as if they had been alone.

"So now that you are quite well you mean to leave us," he said. "When you were so ill that you could hardly move there was no keeping you away from the place."

"I am going to Italy and Greece," said Leonard, who felt unable to explain the seeming inconsistency of his conduct, as Mrs. Digby had requested that her intentions might be kept secret.

"Aye! and afterwards?"

"I am not quite certain what will be my next step," said Leonard.

"Anybody left you a fortune, eh, Moonshine?" asked his companion.

"Not yet," said Leonard, smilingly.

"You are perhaps engaged to marry Miss Reynolds on your return?"

"Nor that," replied Leonard, growing more embarrassed as he saw how singular his proposed retirement must appear to any one unacquainted with his affairs.

"You need not look so guilty," said Courtenay; "but, indeed, I suppose you never happened to see her while you were at Erlesmede?"

"Never—except at church!"

"Really; and how was she looking."

"Just as usual," replied Leonard.

"Indescribable, I suppose," returned Courtenay. "She is in town now. Did you know that?"

"I heard so," replied Leonard.

"She is staying with a connexion of mine, one Lady Jane Lockwood. O'Neill is at the house every day, making strong love."

Leonard sighed, and went on writing.

"Now's your time, Moonshine," said Courtenay, after a pause.

"For what?" asked Leonard, looking up.

"To cut out O'Neill."

"I wonder if it is possible to convince you that I never wish to see Miss Reynolds again?" said Leonard.

Mr. Courtenay's only reply to this remark was an incredulous smile; but he changed the discourse, and invited Leonard to accompany him to the theatre that evening. His aunt, Mrs. Thomason, had secured a box to see Norma, and he wished to introduce Leonard to his relations.

Leonard accepted this proposal with much pleasure; it so happened that he had never before visited one of the London theatres. He had always been too fatigued at the end of his day's duties to seek for any amusement beyond his own fireside; and the great alteration in his prospects had dissipated the morbid feeling of inferiority which would have made

him scrupulously avoid the society of his equals.

Mr. Courtenay had promised to call for him, and he was punctual to the appointed time. They soon found themselves at the theatre, and made their way to the stage box which Mrs. Thomason had secured for her party. The box-keeper threw open the door—Courtenay stepped in first, and said to a lady in a spangled turban who occupied one of the chairs in front,—

"Mrs. Thomason, allow me to name to you Mr. Leonard Warrenne."

Mrs. Thomason received him with much cordiality, asked if he came from the neighbourhood of Gloucester,—evidently mistook him for somebody with whom she ought to be familiar, and made him take the chair behind hers, which she said,—"commanded a good view of the stage."

Leonard obeyed; and being thus brought opposite to the young lady who occupied the

other front seat, was enabled to observe a neck and arm of marble whiteness, and a large circlet of perfectly black hair. She was leaning forward and looking through a lorgnette into the house. She now sank leisurely back into her chair, turned round to her cousin and smiled.

"Well, Charles;—are you going to present Mr. Warrenne to me?" she asked.

Mr. Courtenay, who was standing behind her chair, drily named the parties to each other, held out his hand for her lorgnette, and then in his turn took a survey of the opposite boxes.

"He is not in the house, Charles;" said Miss Thomason, as she resigned her glasses to her cousin.

"So I conclude," returned Mr. Courtenay. "He said he was coming, and therefore was pretty sure not to come."

"He must be a very strange man, that Sir Frederic Manning;" said Mrs. Thomason, arranging her gold chain.

"But I long so much to see him," said Miss Thomason.

"For that reason," remarked Mr. Courtenay, drily.

"Why not?" said Miss Thomason.

"Very natural," returned Mr. Courtenay, in the same tone; "but in the meantime you can ask Warrenne all about him—he comes from the same part of the country."

"Oh! I must ask you first a great deal about Mrs. Creswick, Mr. Warrenne;" said Miss Thomason, she is my godmother; and I have not seen her for such an age! How was she, when you left Erlesmede?"

"Erlesmede!" exclaimed Mrs. Thomason, "oh dear, to be sure!—it is Mr. Warton, whose family live near Gloucester—not Warrenne. I recollect."

This being delivered in the form of a parenthesis, did not prevent Leonard from replying to Miss Thomason's question.

"I am happy to say that Mrs. Creswick

is very well, for her," he replied; "but I did not see her during my recent visit to Erlesmede."

"So very singular," said Courtenay, ironically.

Ada Thomason turned her eyes from her cousin to his friend, without being able to understand this remark. Leonard took up the play-bill and pored over it, and Courtenay suddenly asked him "who played Oroveso," and smiled again, when in his confusion he could not find the name.

The overture was just winding up;—the footlights were rising—the clash of instruments was overpowering, and the blaze of the lamps streamed suddenly upon the audience. Mrs. Thomason unfurled her fan, and Ada drew up one of the shades. Courtenay leaned forward to help his cousin; and they neither of them observed the start with which Leonard rose from his chair.

Florence Reynolds at that moment entered

the opposite box, accompanied by an elderly lady; and attended by a single gentleman.

She glided into the chair opposite the stage, laid her bouquet and handkerchief on the cushion before her, and turning round to the gentleman who was leaning on her chair, took her fan gracefully from him, and opened it to shade her eyes from the light. She was dressed in a perfect cloud of pale blue gauze, and her resplendent complexion, with the unusual profusion of her flaxen ringlets, gave her almost an etherial appearance in the strong light to which she was exposed. Salutations had been exchanged between the inmates of the two boxes; and then, Leonard, who had been hidden behind Mrs. Thomason's turban, got up, and asked Courtenay who were the people opposite.

"Oh! don't you recollect Miss Reynolds?" said Courtenay, turning, and giving a glance across the stage.

"Yes; but the others?"

"Lady Jane Lockwood, and Captain O'Neill;—are there any more?"

"No; that is all," said Leonard, resuming his seat.

"A very heavy opera, don't you think, Mr. Warrenne," said Ada Thomason, leaning back.

"I have never seen it," replied Leonard.

"Oh! I thought everybody had seen *Norma*," said Ada.

"Everybody but myself, I dare say," returned Leonard.

"Mdlle. Moor plays it to-night, the *prima donna* is ill," said Ada.

"I thought she sang very well at our house last night," said Mrs. Thomason.

"She is improving," said Courtenay; "she took in good part my hint about her intonation."

"You are a bold man to criticise so admired a person," said Ada, smiling.

A burst of applause now proclaimed the entrance of *Norma*. She looked magnificent

with her oaken garland, and her gesture of indolent command.

"There is something that I like so much in her eyes," said Ada, turning to Leonard.

"Yes; I agree with you—they are beautiful," replied Leonard, who was gazing intently into the opposite box.

Courtenay turned to him, and drily presented him with his lorgnette.

"You must find it rather fatuiging looking across those lamps," said he; "you had better take this, and I wish it was a telescope for your sake."

Leonard, colouring deeply, laid down the lorgnette, and tried to direct his attention to the stage.

The superb acting of *Norma*, which, to his English taste, was more perfect than her singing, diverted him for a time from the opposite box. As she swept down the stage, she looked up and exchanged a smile with Ada Thomason.

"Oh! Charles," said Ada, "do oblige me by going behind the scenes and asking Mdlle. Moor, when she comes off, to give me a few minutes between the acts. I have a thousand things to say to her."

"Well, I will ask her," said Mr. Courtenay; "but I hope she won't come. It is the ruin of all acting this mixing with the audience."

As soon as Mr. Courtenay was gone, Leonard felt able to bestow his attention more exclusively upon his opposite neighbours.

Captain O'Neill, seated behind Florence, was leaning upon her chair, and whispering eagerly into her ear. Her colour seemed deepened; now and then she turned round with a soft gesture of reproach, and then bending forward addressed all her attention to the performers. Lady Jane looked restless and uncomfortable, and seemed to be watching her companions with some uneasiness. Leonard's curiosity was at its height, when Courtenay entered with Mdlle. Moor on his arm. She

was wrapt in a large shawl, kept at the back of the box, lest the audience should recognise her wreath; and after a few hurried sentences exchanged with Ada Thomason, she was conducted back again by Mr. Courtenay.

"I declare I don't know what I should do without Charles," said Ada, turning to Leonard.

"Nor I," said Mrs. Thomason; "his good-nature to you is unbounded; and really you do sometimes put it to a pretty strong test."

"It is so good for him to be teazed occasionally," said Ada, in reply.

"I think Miss Reynolds looks bored with that man's conversation," said Mrs. Thomason glancing in the opposite box.

"Who would not be?" returned Ada, "but Lady Jane seems to take it to heart more than Florence."

"I think he is making a declaration," said Mrs. Thomason.

"I am dying to know! I shall send Charles round as soon as he comes back;" said Ada.

Leonard, trembling with anxiety, kept his eyes rivetted upon Florence, and upon Captain O'Neill, whose manner became more agitated every moment.

"Well Charles, was she in time?" asked Ada, as her cousin returned.

"Oh yes! all this stuff is to last some time yet;" said Mr. Courtenay pointing to the stage, where the dim watchfires were smouldering on the druidical altars, and Adalgisa and Pollione were occupying the scene.

"Look at my bouquet, Mr. Warrenne, is it not splendid?" asked Ada: "I could hardly believe my senses when Charles brought it to me this morning; he is so little in the way of such gallantries—but judge of my mortification when he remarked, 'If you must needs throw your bouquet to Mademoiselle Moor, you may as well have a good one!'"

Leonard could not help laughing at this characteristic speech.

"Take care, Charles," said Mrs. Thomason, "I think you are losing your heart to this handsome Jewess!"

"What a susceptible heart I must have," said Mr. Courtenay. "You accused me of a weakness for Fanny Palmer, when I put on her shawl the other day, and for both the Miss Northcotes, because I said they had good teeth."

"And I must say for Charles that Edla Moor is not a Jewess!" exclaimed Ada.

"Well, she is a singer at any rate;" returned Mrs. Thomason.

This remark was incontrovertible, and the party turned their attention to the stage.

"How well she walks," said Courtenay, who was gazing at Norma through his glass; see how steadily she carries her head; and what passion in her gestures! If she would

but get out of that crying tone, she would be equal to Pasta.

"I wish you would say all these fine things to her instead of finding fault with her as you do," said Ada: "but look, Charles, I want you to find out what your friend over there is about."

Captain O'Neill had all this time been increasing every moment in the impetuosity of his gestures. Florence, on the contrary, had grown colder and more distant. At last he appeared to lose all his self-command. He started from his chair, stamped on the ground with violence, and appeared to be giving way to a burst of indignant reproach. Florence shrank back, evidently frightened; and Lady Jane held up her hand as if deprecating his vehemence. He then turned abruptly from her, and rushed out of the box.

"I don't know, eh! Leonard," said Courtenay, "I think I will just go and see what it is all about. Lady Jane is using her salts as

if she meant to be overcome. Take care of these ladies, my dear Moonshine, until I come back."

Mr. Courtenay soon made his appearance in the opposite box, addressed Lady Jane with his usual calmness, and received from her what appeared to be a very animated explanation of the foregoing scene; Florence now and then turning half disdainfully towards him, and adding something to her friend's remarks.

After a few minute's conversation, he shook hands with Lady Jane, and left the box without taking any further notice of Florence.

"I quite long to hear all about it," said Ada; "Charles will be back in a minute, and meantime we can listen to this beautiful duet."

The audience eagerly demanded an encore, and the attention of the party was entirely directed to the stage; but as soon as the encore and the applause that followed was over, Ada turned uneasily to Leonard.

"Where can Charles be," she said; "did

not you see him leave Lady Jane just before the duet?"

"Yes, I certainly did," replied Leonard.

"Why, then, mama, where can he be?" exclaimed Ada, turning impatiently to her mother.

"Oh, my dear, I don't know; something has detained him—what a long act this is!" said Mrs. Thomason.

"I wish it was over," said Ada; "and then he *must* come back; he knows we don't stay the afterpiece, because of Mrs. Hartley's ball."

"No, we must leave directly after the opera. I wonder whether Lady Jane has sent him anywhere?" said Mrs. Thomason.

"I think not; he took leave of her, as if he did not mean to come back—didn't it strike you so, Mr. Warrenne?"

Leonard had no ideas on the subject, but he thought it best to agree with Miss Thomason; and then as the curtain slowly fell upon the senseless figure of *Norma*, as she lay

shrouded in the funeral veil, Mrs. Thomason began to grow uneasy in her turn.

"It is very odd," said she; "he never played us such a trick before. I declare I'm quite angry with him!"

"I wish I *was* angry!" cried Ada, rising hastily, and sweeping down with her shawl the costly bouquet that was to have graced the triumph of Mdlle. Moor. "Let us get out of all this clamour, my dear mama; for I can neither speak nor think here!"

"Take care of Ada, Mr. Warrenne; never mind me," said Mrs. Thomason, as Leonard offered that lady his arm on leaving the box.

"Our carriage will be waiting at the corner," said Ada. "Mama would not have it draw up for worlds; she is so afraid of a crowd."

"And you must really come home with us, and get some coffee," said Mrs. Thomason; "and then, perhaps, you may hear something of Charles."

Leonard cast one glance upon the stage as they were leaving the box. The curtain was held back at the opposite side, and the impatient audience were gratified by another sight of the singer. She walked a few paces towards the lamps, stooped her head to the loud applause that burst forth on her re-appearance, and then retired with the grave and haughty demeanour that was habitual to her.

At the same instant Lady Jane Lockwood and Florence rose and left their box.

"I hope you were pleased with Mademoiselle Moor, Mr. Warrenne?" said Ada, as Leonard conducted her down the staircase.

Leonard expressed his admiration in due terms.

"I understand you are a musical family," continued Ada; "you sisters are beautiful singers?"

"Yes," Leonard replied; "they were all fond of music; he believed he might say that his youngest sister had a talent for it."

"And then she is blind," said Ada. "I long to know her; she must be so very interesting."

Leonard, who had never heard his sisters called interesting before, could only say that he was sure they would derive much pleasure from becoming acquainted with Miss Thomason.

"I like Edla Moor so much!" said Ada; "she bears such a high character—with scores of admirers—not a word has ever been said against her—and in society she is the most simple, obliging creature in the world."

By this time they had reached the doors of the theatre, and Leonard, who was bending down and listening to his companion, had not before perceived that Lady Jane and Florence had joined Mrs. Thomason, and the former lady was pouring out her grievances to her friends.

"We never were in such a dilemma," said Lady Jane; "an unforeseen accident has deprived us of our cavalier, and I don't see a

soul here that one knows to call up our carriage!"

"And what do you think of our fate, Lady Jane," said Ada, joining her mother at the moment, "who have lost our cavalier without any accident to account for it? I suppose you can give us no news of Charles?"

"No; I was just telling Mrs. Thomason, I thought he had gone back to you! But you had two strings to your bow," and Lady Jane glanced at Leonard, who was standing a little behind.

"It is a pity we can't divide you—you are at a premium to night, Mr. Warrenne," said Ada.

"Can I do anything for—Lady Jane?" asked Leonard, in a low voice, of Ada.

"This gentleman is very anxious to be of service to you," said Ada, turning gaily to Lady Jane.

"I am so much obliged—so sorry to trouble you," said that lady, coming forward, "if you would be so very good as to call my car-

riage—dark blue and gold liveries; I dare say it's not far off."

Leonard hastened out; and Florence, turning to Ada, said,—

"Pray, how long may you have known Mr. Leonard Warrenne?"

"This is our first interview; but I like him so much!" said Ada; "he has such a mournful, *Stuart* sort of look; he'll die early, I dare say."

"My dear, you should not allow yourself to imagine such things," said Mrs. Thomason; I have no doubt the young gentleman will live as long as his neighbours."

Leonard now returned, with the news that her ladyship's carriage had drawn up, and handed Lady Jane across the portico into it. Florence followed; and as he offered her his hand, in turn, to mount the steps, she said, in a tone that meant to be playful, but that faltered, in spite of herself,—

"I presume I have not the honour to be recollected by Mr. Leonard Warrenne?"

"It is impossible that Miss Reynolds can be forgotten by any one:" replied Leonard, gravely; and having seen Lady Jane off, he went back to the Thomasons, and escorted them to their carriage.

"All this time I am very anxious about Charles," said Ada; "I hope we shall find him quietly established in the drawing-room when we get home—though how to account for his absence, I cannot think."

Mrs. Thomason, who was growing sleepy, did not seem to interest herself about the matter; she reclined in her corner of the carriage, and only roused herself to express some doubt that crossed her mind whether "that tiresome Celestine had sent home her dress-hat."

The moment the carriage stopped, before even the steps were let down, Ada leaned out, and desired to know whether Mr. Courtenay had come in.

"No; the servant had not seen him."

She hurried upstairs into the drawing-

room; while Mrs. Thomason, leaning on Leonard's arm, made a slower ascent, as became her size. Ada was looking over the few cards and notes, which she had seized from the table in the hope that there might be among them some message from Mr. Courtenay.

"No; there is nothing here," she said, as they entered, turning on them her face perfectly blanched by fear. "What can I think? Good Heaven! Mr. Warrenne, he can't have fought that man!"

"Quite impossible at this time of night," said Leonard, smiling; "besides, I don't clearly know what they should quarrel about."

"Oh! perhaps he was insolent to Lady Jane; those officers are often very ill-mannered where they can get nothing from you: and Lady Jane is a connection of my cousin's, you know."

Mrs. Thomason, who was waking up by

degrees as she stirred and sipped her coffee, now looked towards her daughter.

"Don't you mean to put something into your hair for the ball, my dear?" she asked.

"Oh, goodness! Mamma," I can't go to Mrs. Hartley's unless we hear or see something of Charles first," said Ada. "I am frightened to death. What can we do, Mr. Warrenne?"

"I wish heartily that I could relieve your anxiety," said Leonard, "if you had any idea where to send me in search of him."

"Dear me, Ada, what nonsense," exclaimed Mrs. Thomason; "nothing can have happened, can it, Mr. Warrenne? Young men will be young men. Charles has met some friend who has asked him to supper, or to some party that he did not care to miss, don't you think so, Mr. Warrenne."

Her appealing to Leonard plainly proved how little weight she attached to her own explanation; but still she took another cup of coffee and a brioche, and seemed to enjoy them.

"You know him better," said Ada, fixing her earnest eyes upon Leonard; "he does nothing like other people—like *young men!*" she added with a touch of peevishness, as she pushed her coffee-cup from her.

"Pray do stay, Mr. Warrenne, said Mrs. Thomason. I hope every minute to see Charles; and really Mr. Thomason being in Cornwall, I should feel quite lonely if anything did occur."

It seemed to be Leonard's particular fate to become the protector of ladies. He had no great ambition to sit up all night; but he acquiesced very courteously, and they all drew their chairs into a circle round the blazing fire, looking very comfortable, and feeling as much the reverse as it is possible to imagine.

"There's a carriage! No; but he would walk;—he walks a great deal," said Ada: and he had not his cab this evening. He can never mean to leave us in this suspense till to-morrow."

"Half-past eleven," said Mrs. Thomason, as the timepiece on the side table chimed the half hour.

"I think you are rather fast," said Leonard, looking at his watch.

"What are you, Mr. Warrenne?" asked Ada, eagerly.

"Only a quarter after," said Leonard.

"I am sure it is very kind of you, Mr. Warrenne, to wait so long;—is it not, Mamma," said Ada.

"Yes, my dear, very kind; and I hardly know how to express to Mr. Warrenne how much obliged I feel, and I do wish you would let me ring for some wine and water for you (two bows from Leonard, and a negative put upon the wine and water);—but, my dear, I am quite distressed about this ball; Mrs. Hartley made such a point of our going

"I can't help it, Mamma," said Ada, in a desponding tone; "I only know I cannot go."

"I do wish you would," said Mrs. Thoma-

son; "now don't you think, Mr. Warrenne, that if she only took a little *sal volatile*, and made the exertion, she would be all the better for it? and then, at breakfast, she would most likely find her cousin, as usual."

It just trembled on the borders of Leonard's mind, that Mrs. Thomason, with her diamond spray on her bosom, and her ermine rug beneath her feet, was rather a vulgar woman; but of course he had only to say that if Miss Thomason could make up her mind to go to the ball, the time would probably appear less long than if she sat up waiting at home.

Ada shook her head, and sank again into silence; and then Leonard, having nothing on earth to do, but to look at her, became aware for the first time that she was singularly handsome, both in face and person. She was perfectly white—a pure, warm white, which leaves nothing of colour to be desired. Her eyes and hair were of that violet black so frequently celebrated in the lyrical poetry of the Greeks.

She was small, beautifully rounded, and as indolent as a Georgian. It was only such a fright as her present suspense, that could rouse her from her languid ease. Her broad, low forehead, her calm, still eyes, and even the rounded arms and taper fingers that fell so sleepily by her sides, seemed formed to express the perfect repose of her disposition.

Meanwhile, conversation flagged. Mrs. Thomason began to nod, Ada sat watching the timepiece, and Leonard was arguing with himself whether it would be possible to propose his going home, when the noiseless door opened, and Courtenay walked into the room.

"I hope you did not wait for me," he said, going quietly up to his aunt. "I knew I left you in good hands; and I was summoned on a little business for a friend, which could not be put off."

This address partially awoke Mrs. Thomason from her slumbers. She began giving an incoherent account of how much she had been

alarmed, and how she had tried to persuade Ada to put something in her hair and go to Mr. Hartley's ball. Meantime Ada, who had drawn nearer to her cousin while her mother was speaking, and had kept her eyes earnestly fixed on his countenance, now took alarm at the rigid stillness of his aspect.

"He is going to fight!" she exclaimed, with a burst of tears. "I am sure of it, mamma! look at his face—how guilty!"

"Really this is very foolish," said Courtenay, leading her back to her chair; "who would you have me fight, in heaven's name? And crying, too! Did you ever know a case in which crying mended matters? Let me get you a glass of water?"

"No; but that man," said Ada, holding back her cousin, "there was something between him and Miss Reynolds, and you resented it; why, I can see you are as pale as death!"

"You are a child," said Courtenay, gravely,

after a pause, during which he seemed to grow even paler than before. "O'Neill left Miss Reynolds this evening exasperated by her decided rejection of his proposal. I knew he believed himself certain of success, and that he looked to this marriage as the only means of repairing his fortunes. I went down to his hotel with the intention of offering him any assistance in my power; but I was too late—he had shot himself, five minutes before I arrived.

A deep silence followed this terrible announcement, which was first broken by Leonard, who, murmuring some attempt at a farewell to the ladies hurried out of the room, and into the air.

CHAPTER II.

Nay, there are women, Polidora, too,
That can do pretty well at flatteries;
Make men believe they dote, will languish for 'em.
Beaumont and Fletcher.

There were seeds
Scattered upon my heart that made it swell
With thoughts of Empire.
Ibid.

Leonard did not see Mr. Courtenay for several days. Indeed, from the interval that elapsed, he concluded that he secluded himself until after the funeral of his friend. Although he must have been perfectly unable to respect any one point in Captain O'Neill's character, he entertained that sort of regard for him, which

is frequently met with in people who have known each other from children. A liking cemented by habit; and as little proportioned to the exact merit of the individual, as the interest felt for a relative. Leonard felt the event as deeply as Mr. Courtenay; but he bestowed upon the caprice and treachery of Miss Reynolds, those regrets which the other felt for the awful death of the disappointed suitor.

"There's an invitation from Mrs. Thomason," said Courtenay, one day, laying a printed paper upon Leonard's desk.

"To a ball," said Leonard, hesitating.

"Yes; you had better begin to talk about your station. Do. I advise you."

"My station does not annoy me as it did," said Leonard, smiling.

"That's well. You *must* go. I told Ada I would bring you; she is so grateful to you for staying with them that night."

"Miss Thomason overrates my services," said Leonard. "I really did nothing."

"And you will meet your idol, Miss Reynolds, too," said Courtenay. "I understand she is coming."

"I don't know why you associate me always with Miss Reynolds," said Leonard. "I have no interest in her; and I confess now, I should be pained to meet her."

"What is the meaning of *now?*" asked Courtenay.

"Since the death of Captain O'Neill," returned Leonard.

"Oh! I thought you had got some moonshine notion of that sort into your head," said Courtenay. "Well, I should not at all wonder if I were to marry her some day myself—so I give you fair warning if you have a mind to cut me out."

"Good Heaven! but you make a jest of everything!"

"I am not jesting on my word;—my friends bore me to marry—and it is a matter of perfect indifference to me who the lady is—so long as

she is not absolutely disagreeable. *Filer le parfait amour*, is not at all to my taste."

Leonard was silenced as usual by the expression of sentiments so different from his own. He hardly knew if Mr. Courtenay was in earnest; but supposing he was, in such matters he had surely a right to his own opinions.

Courtenay insisted on calling for Leonard, and driving him to Mrs. Thomason's—it was so much out of his way, that Leonard was unwilling to accept his offer, and opposed it by a variety of arguments. But Mr. Courtenay never discussed his plans. He simply said,—"I shall call for you;" and was as good as his word.

As soon as they entered the ball room, Ada Thomason, who almost seemed as if she had been on the watch for their arrival, came forward to greet them. She was in high beauty. Her raven hair gathered low behind, and woven into a large coronet that completely encircled

her head, intermixed with a wreath of velvet oak leaves.

She received Leonard with much courtesy, and then turned to her cousin.

"Well Charles," she said, laying her hand on his arm, "I have been wanting you already."

"I don't doubt it;" he replied. "What's the matter?"

"Do you know," she said, "it is very unfortunate; but everybody does so shun Miss Reynolds, it is quite marked—I have asked several persons to dance with her, but they all excuse themselves. They said," added Miss Thomason, lowering her voice to a whisper, "that she *murdered* Captain O'Neill."

"Excessively like 'everybody,' to say anything so absurd," remarked Courtenay, drily, "I'll dance with her presently if you like it."

"Oh! thank you, Charles," returned Ada, "I hoped you would: poor thing! I do so pity her!"

"Take my advice," said Courtenay; It is the fashion of the day to be so very Christian —to pity, rather than blame any one who behaves in a rascally manner. Pity all the *good* people who are in trouble, *first*, my dear Ada; and then if you have any left, (which I doubt) you can begin to pity the bad. And here is Warrenne dying to engage you for this waltz, unless indeed," he added to Leonard, "you would prefer to take a turn with Miss Reynolds, instead: in which case I'll do my best for you."

But Leonard drew back hastily, and lost no time in securing the hand of Miss Thomason for the waltz. Mr. Courtenay went into the next room to speak to some of his acquaintances, and Ada proposed to wait a little before they joined the waltzers, as the circle was very crowded. In moving up the room to look for a seat Leonard found himself close to Miss Reynolds. She was paler than usual and seemed harrassed and out of spirits.

Leonard merely bowed to her, and made no attempt to speak. Perhaps she expected that he would have asked her to dance, which would then have been a welcome invitation, for this was the first time in her life in which she found herself sitting neglected in a ball room. She was partly indignant, but more alarmed by the view people seemed to take of her conduct. She well knew that, but for the suicide of Captain O'Neill, she might have gone on coquetting as long as her beauty (or more properly speaking, her money) lasted: but she saw that people who always judge of results, not of motives, ascribed to her a catastrophe which might more correctly be attributed to his own foolish and ungoverned temper. The idea of incurring the neglect that is very properly evinced towards women who have neither beauty nor fortune, filled her with terror. She raised her eyes imploringly towards Leonard, but he did not observe her

glance. He was talking earnestly with Ada Thomason.

"I believe we must be thankful for standing room, Miss Thomason," said he; "there seems no chance of a seat."

"Never mind, we shall be off in a minute. This is rather a different meeting from our last:" she added, looking archly up at Leonard.

"It is indeed," said he; "if I had been Courtenay, how flattered I should have felt at your anxiety."

"Instead of which he took it quite as a matter of course," replied Ada laughing. But the fact is, that having no brother, he has supplied the place of one to me for a good many years. I never was so miserable; Now, what did *you* think had happened?"

"I was quite at a loss to know," replied Leonard; "but he is so well able to take care of himself that I did not for a moment suppose he had got into any mischief."

Florence meantime remained watching Leonard with the greatest anxiety. She was surprised and in her heart deeply gratified at meeting him in such society. Often in the days of their early acquaintance, she had argued herself into the belief that it was impossible she could love one so much beneath her in his worldly position. But now, carressed by the Thomasons, and intimate with the fastidious Courtenay, she felt that the gulf between them was overstepped; the barrier that now existed was of his own raising—it was evident that he no longer wished to excite her interest. At another time this might have given her but little uneasiness, but now, depressed and neglected, she felt the loss of his regard with a keenness that cannot be expressed.

Leonard and Ada were now mingled with the dancers, and she followed their rapid movements with her weary eyes, until they disappeared from the circle. Leonard con-

ducted Miss Thomason to the refreshment room after the waltz, where Mr. Courtenay was standing talking to some of his acquaintances. Ada took a seat near her cousin, and Leonard brought her some ice.

Mr. Osborne who was eating sugar plums at the table, came up to her, and engaged her for the next dance.

"How dweadfully shocked I was at O'Neill's death," said he; "it weally is too howwible. Courtenay was thewe diwectly after the event, he tells me."

"Yes! don't talk of it, I can't bear to hear it mentioned," said Ada.

"But it weally was such an extwaordinary proceeding," persisted Mr. Osborne. "If I was wefused, I would never shoot myself, would you, Courtenay?"

"Decidedly not," said Courtenay, "but I should like any one to try the same game with me that she did with O'Neill—they would not find it answer."

"Why, you could not help being wefused?" said Mr. Osborne.

"Could not I?" returned Courtenay, drily.

"Give me your receipt then, will you?" said a gentleman who was standing near, "I may find it of use some day."

"I did not know you were here," said Courtenay, shaking hands with the speaker.

"Only just come to town;" replied the gentleman. "I say, is not that a son of Mr. Warrenne, of Erlesmede?"

"Yes, Sir Frederick Manning—Mr. Leonard Warrenne."

"I thought so," said Sir Frederic, coming up to Leonard and shaking hands with him—your father is a very old friend of mine—I ought to know you."

Sir Frederic had been a sailor in his early youth; he had a deep scar across his forehead, picked up at Navarino. A thousand extravagances were told of his career afterwards—some of which were true, and some of course

utterly without foundation. He had been a great traveller—exposed to a great many dangers, and involved, report says, in a great many adventures. Nothing could exceed the frankness of his manners and language, partly owing to his early habits, but more because he cared not one straw what people said or thought of him.

"But I say—this is really a dreadful story—is it true?" asked Sir Frederic.

"True!—I should think so," replied Mr. Courtenay, "there's no mistake when a man blows his brains out."

"I don't know—people said I shot myself when I was at Cadiz," returned Sir Frederic; "but I say, Courtenay, I had a narrow escape of her—you know she refused me—everybody knows it—she spread it all over the county—so it is of no use for me to make a secret of it!"

And Sir Frederic burst into a hearty laugh that seemed as if his heart had not suffered greatly in the conflict.

"I met her at a ball;" continued Sir Frederic, "thought her very handsome, don't you? As soon as I could find time I made her an offer—well, it is a fact that she fancied I was after her fortune—I was rather hard up just then it is true—but it would be beyond me to marry a woman for her money. I'll never make up to an heiress again—never, if there's not another handsome woman left in the world! She laughed in my face, confound her!—she did on my word; but it's abominable, her treatment of O'Neill; because the poor fellow made so sure of her."

"I don't see that it is a jot more abominable than her treatment of half-a-dozen others; because the man chances to destroy himself, people lay the blame on her," returned Courtenay; "she had nothing on earth to do with it, in my opinion."

"Ah! you are a philosopher," replied Sir Frederic, taking up a biscuit and eating it with great composure as he spoke; "but *à-propos*,

find me a partner, will you?—a woman without a sixpence of course, and I shall be much obliged to you—you know everybody here, I suppose, and I never saw a soul of them before."

"As soon as you like," returned Courtenay, looking round the room; "I don't know, I declare, whether Miss Lee has any money;—I'll ask her."

Leonard looked all amazement as Mr. Courtenay crossed over to Miss Lee, a tall animated girl, who was talking and laughing with two or three young men.

"Miss Lee, I have a particular reason for asking whether you have a large fortune?" said Courtenay.

"Not a groat—go along with you, and try somewhere else," she replied, laughing.

"On the contrary, I must beg that you will let me choose you a partner for this polka."

"Well, you are a good soul—you think I want one all the more, for my poverty. Quite sorry; but I am engaged three deep."

"Charles!" exclaimed Ada, as he passed her.

Mr. Courtenay paused.

"Engage me to Sir Frederic?"

"Oh no—that wont do."

"But it must do."

"Impossible—he has a prejudice."

"Against *me?*"

Mr. Courtenay made a sign of assent, and passed on.

"What's the matter—wont she do?" asked Sir Frederic, who was looking indifferently on.

"Engaged—that's all," replied Mr. Courtenay.

"Who's that pretty little dark thing, talking to Warrenne?"

"Oh, she won't do—a millionare."

"She't very pretty though," said Sir Frederic, gazing attentively at Ada.

"Let me name you to Miss Palmer," said Courtenay, touching Sir Frederic, to recall his attention from Miss Thomason.

Sir Frederic exchanged bows with the young lady, was engaged to her for the next dance, and then, without taking any farther notice of her, rose suddenly, and went up to Leonard.

"I say, Warrenne, how is young Scudamore getting on?" he asked.

"Pretty well, I believe—not very fast," returned Leonard.

"Do you think he will ever get over that injury?" asked Sir Frederic.

"My father says he will, if he takes the commonest care of himself," replied Leonard.

"Now, Miss Thomason, may I have the pleasuwe," said Mr. Osborne, as the sounds of the Cricket Polka echoed from the ball-room.

"I told you the next quadrille, Mr. Osborne," said Ada, hastily—I don't mean to dance this polka; the ball room is so warm."

"Oh, I declawe I mistook; I thought you said the polka," replied Mr. Osborne.

"No, the next quadrille," said Ada, colouring.

Mr. Osborne went to seek another partner, and Ada remained seated in the refreshment room, with Leonard leaning on the back of her chair, and Sir Frederic talking to him.

"I like him exceedingly," continued Sir Frederic; "you know he gained great credit leading that storming party, and then there was a sortie he made with a handful of sepoys from a fortress somewhere in the north. Have you read Pulci?"

"I have looked at him," said Leonard; "I am but a poor Italian scholar."

"Well, his way of describing anything reminds me of one of Pulci's knights—there's an absolute simplicity in all he says that is delightful. Fine times those, Mr. Warrenne."

"Very fine," replied Leonard.

"But you ought to get up Italian, if you mean to travel," said Sir Frederic. "It is in-

dispensable in the Mediterranean—the Greek Isles"——

"I thought French would carry me through," said Leonard.

"Not every where," said Sir Frederic; then coming closer to Leonard, he gave him a push, with an expressive glance towards Ada, and added, "Make her talk!"

Leonard opened his large grey eyes so very wide at this modest request, that Sir Frederic was seized with a violent fit of laughter, in the midst of which he stopped short with a look of dismay. "I say," he exclaimed, "is that polka over?"

"Yes," replied Leonard.

"Bless me, I was to have danced with some one—I forgot all about it; where's my partner? I suppose the next dance will do as well."

"What was the lady's name?" asked Leonard.

"That I don't know; she had a pearl net on her head. Oh! well, it does not signify.

If you happen to see her, make some excuse for me," said Sir Frederic; and he walked off to the card room.

Mr. Courtenay in the meantime had gone in search of Miss Reynolds, who, tired of remaining a mere spectator of the dance, had gone into the card-room, and was standing beside Lady Jane Lockwood.

"Are you not dancing, my dear?" asked Lady Jane.

"No, I don't think I shall dance to-night," said Florence, languidly, drawing a chair towards the table.

"Well, Miss Reynolds," said Courtenay, approaching her; "how did you leave all at Erlesmede?"

"All quite well, and as dull as usual," returned Florence.

"I can hardly fancy Mrs. Creswick dull, or the Warrennes either," said Courtenay.

"I know nothing about the Warrennes," said Florence; "except that Mr. Leonard is

going to be married to a rich old woman in the neighbourhood."

"I hope not," said Courtenay, with his peculiar ironical smile, "because I have a rich *young* woman in my eye for him."

"Mr. Courtenay a match-maker!" said Florence, disdainfully.

"Yes, sometimes; shall I exert my talents in your behalf? I could find you a *parti* who should be your *match* in every sense Miss Reynolds," said Courtenay, pointedly.

"Thank you, Mr. Courtenay, when my case becomes very desperate, I may apply to you," said Florence, with animation.

She felt a good deal flattered by his notice, because she had hitherto found it impossible to obtain it. If she could bring *him* to her feet, with all his coldness, it would be the greatest triumph she had ever achieved.

"Well now, shall we dance this next quadrille together?" said Courtenay, carelessly.

"With pleasure," said Miss Reynolds,

rising at once; "I believe I have never danced with you before, Mr. Courtenay."

"Have you not?" replied Courtenay, leading her into the ball-room; "which set shall we join—this one? Leonard, are you consoling Fanny Palmer for Sir Frederic's desertion? Come and be our *vis-à-vis,* will you?"

Leonard obeyed his friend; and Courtenay, seeing that Miss Reynolds looked rather confused, said to her—

"You should always contrive to secure a victim for a *vis-à-vis,* it makes the thing more picquant; you see how careful I am of your interests."

"Oh! Mr. Courtenay," said Florence, blushing and smiling, "you grow quite scandalous! besides you really over-rate my power."

Courtenay bestowed upon her a scrutinizing look which she could not exactly comprehend; she only felt that he would be a very difficult person to subdue.

"And when do you go back to Erlesmede?" asked Courtenay.

"Oh! as soon as papa arrives in England," said Florence; "we are expecting a letter to announce him every mail."

"How impatient you must be," said Courtenay, drily.

"Oh, yes! of course papa will have a house in Town—he will never think of burying himself in the country; and I shall be able to do just as I please then. I flatter myself there will be none of the monotony of Erlesmede in my establishment."

Courtenay smiled.

"What makes you smile? Do you suppose papa will not let me have my way in everything?"

"I know I would not," said he very quietly.

"Why, Mr. Courtenay, you must be an absolute monster!"

"I have no doubt you would think me so," he replied coolly.

"I don't believe a word you say!" exclaimed Florence prettily. "I am sure you could never refuse anything to a person whom you loved."

"Ah! I believe you are right there," replied Courtenay.

Florence misunderstood him. Her eyes sparkled with gratified vanity.

"See! I knew you were only jesting," she exclaimed; "you are one of those tiresome persons who make themselves out worse than they really are. Lady Jane is going I see; I declare I am half sorry—no, I will not give you the trouble of looking for my shawl; you think it a trouble, don't you?"

"Certainly," replied Courtenay.

"I don't know what to do with you, Mr. Courtenay, you are quite a character I see—Now I must trouble you to hold my bouquet for a moment, while I tie my hood. Shall we see you at Lady Jane's on Wednesday?"

"I really don't know so long before" replied Courtenay; "perhaps I shall look in."

"Oh, do come!—Miss Lockwood will be there; she is so pretty. And as you confess yourself a match-maker you may bring any one that you think would suit her!"

"Well, I must step in to see Miss Lockwood," replied Courtenay. "Take my arm, your carriage is up."

Florence drove off, half piqued, half pleased. strange and cold as he was, she had attracted him for half the evening. She had done more than she ever expected to accomplish; and if he had a heart, hard as it was, it was well worth breaking.

CHAPTER III.

Cha.—His love was firm to you, and cannot be
Uprooted by one storm.—*The Coronation.*

A few days after the ball, Leonard was informed that Mr. Thomason had supplied his place, and that he was at liberty to withdraw from his service. He did not receive this intelligence with all the joy that he had once believed it would excite. Although he would not have confessed as much to himself, he felt a reluctance to leave the country while so much uncertainty attended the fate of Miss Reynolds. He had heard from Courtenay that the other suitors, who had retired during the

apparent favour of Captain O'Neill, were now beginning to return their allegiance; and he almost wished that he could put off his departure until she should have decided for or against some one of them.

"Thinking of Miss Reynolds, eh?" asked Courtenay, as they were going together to make a call on Mrs. Thomason, previous to Leonard's leaving Town.

"I did happen to be thinking of her, or rather of her suitors," said Leonard, boldly.

"And what is the result of your meditations?"

"I was merely speculating on their chance of success," replied Leonard.

"Is that all, Moonshine? then set your mind at rest; don't trouble yourself to call them out, it would be a mere waste of powder; by the time you return to England it is very probable your fair enemy will be Mrs. Courtenay."

"I cannot believe you," replied Leonard; "I am sure you must despise Miss Reynolds."

"No I don't," replied Mr. Courtenay, "at least not so much as you would think. She is a coquette—well, that is a habit she will leave off when she becomes my wife. And let me tell you, I don't think the worse of her attractions when I see that such a philosopher as yourself finds it altogether impossible to forget her."

"I never denied her attractions," said Leonard; "I think her a syren."

"No; stop, my dear Moonshine!" said Mr. Courtenay; "don't be hard upon her vocal powers. A Syren! That's too satirical when *you know* she cannot sing a single bar in tune! I'm afraid I must get her to leave off music, when matters are a little more forward."

Leonard, finding that his friend was not disposed to be serious, dropped the subject; and they went on in silence to Mrs. Thomason's.

It was a splendid house. The broad staircase was fragrant with flowers; and as they

mounted the stairs they heard the sound of the piano, mingled with a full, rich soprano voice.

"Hark!" said Courtenay, "Do you know the singer?"

"It is Mdlle. Moor," said Leonard.

"Right as my glove," said Courtenay; "we will go in here, and so escape the *levée* in the drawing-room."

The door he opened took them at once into the inner drawing-room, the folding doors of which were half closed; a bow-window at the end was quite filled with plants and creepers, in the midst of which stood a beautiful statue of Ada, in the character of Ruth, gleaning. The original of this statue was reclining in the lowest possible easy chair, just opposite to the piano where sat Mdlle. Moor, in the act of concluding one of those delightful German story ballads, which are so common in their music. She finished with perfect composure, and then rising and putting on her little velvet bonnet

which she had laid beside her while she sang, she advanced to receive his greeting.

"Mr. Courtenay is quite welcome to the little moral at the end of my ballad, which is all he heard of it," she said, in reply to his thanks. "I do not know if it is necessary to warn him against Mermaids"—

"And Syrens," added Courtenay, looking at Leonard. "But I don't like to see you put on your black cap, because I am afraid it is a sign you mean to give us no more singing."

"My black cap!" said the singer, taking off her bonnet and looking at it. "It is the very prettiest bonnet in all London. Ask your cousin!"

"I chose it," said Ada.

"She said I was to make so many conquests in it," continued Mdlle. Moor; "and since I have bought it I have conquered nothing, except one mad, strange person who came to see me—what is his name, then, Miss Thomason?"

"Sir Frederic Manning," said Ada.

"He wanted me to teach him singing," pursued the German, "and all his voice was like this;" and Mdlle. Moor, with the *naïveté* and readiness of imitation so often seen in foreigners, made some sounds like a person choking. "There, no more voice than you have!" she added, turning to Courtenay.

"Come, let me hold your bonnet, and go back to the piano," said Courtenay. "If you can say nothing pleasanter than that, you had better sing."

"Well, you ask your cousin to take a second, and we will sing you a duet," said Mdlle. Moor.

"No; don't, Charles," said Ada. "Mdlle. Moor was going to sing me the 'Erl-king.' And I have not sung for an age; my voice is out of order."

"And that is the end of the hundreds that have found their way into the pockets of those Italian fellows," said Mr. Courtenay.

"Upon my word, it's a shocking waste of money; you had better have given it to a hospital."

"Now, don't moralise, Charles," said Ada; "take Mdlle. Moor to the piano, and sit down somewhere, out of my way."

Mr. Courtenay obeyed his cousin, and Mdlle. Moor had hardly begun the symphony when they heard a voice at the very foot of the stairs echoing the porter's words, "Not at home? *Is* at home! Confound the fellow! can't he speak plain?" And presently Sir Frederic Manning's name was announced in the outer drawing-room.

"Hush! Stay;" said Mdlle. Moor, sliding from the piano, "there is my strange acquaintance. No; don't let him come in, Mr. Courtenay."

"Who is in the other room?" said Mr. Courtenay to Ada.

"Only Mrs. Palmer, and Mrs. Lee, with Mamma," she replied.

"I must take pity on him, then," said Courtenay, going to the folding doors.

Mrs. Thomason was standing between "the coming and parting guests," returning the adieux of the matrons, and the salutation of Sir Frederic.

"Why, Charles," said she, turning round, "I did not know you were here. I am in such trouble. Sir Frederic, I hope you will excuse,—you will find my daughter in the next room. You don't know, Charles, how insolent Gilbert has been this morning. I suppose Ada has not said a word to you. Oh! I gave him warning on the spot; but I wanted to consult you about getting another butler."

Sir Frederic darted through the folding doors at the beginning of this exordium. He bowed to Ada, shook hands with Leonard, and then turned to Mademoiselle Moor who was putting on her bonnet for the second time at the glass over the chimney piece.

"What! *you* here," he said, advancing to her.

Leonard could not but admire the total change in her manner—all her familiar ease seemed to vanish. She bowed in silence, finished tying the strings, and smoothing the dark bands of her hair with her finger, and then took the corner of the couch next to Ada.

"But the Erl-king?" said Ada, smiling.

"You were going to sing," exclaimed Sir Frederic, starting up; "begin at once, I entreat you!"

"Pray don't disappoint us," said Leonard.

"Now you are all of you teazing Mademoiselle Moor to death," said Mrs. Thomason, coming in with Mr. Courtenay; "I beg Mademoiselle, that you won't attend to them."

"This is a promise," said the German, drawing off her gloves.

Sir Frederic took the gloves from her, and held them while she sang.

"Its too affecting!" said Mrs. Thomason, wiping her eyes.

"Mamma always cries at the Erl-king you know," said Ada.

"Yes, even when *you* sing it," said Mrs. Thomason; "though of course it's not to be compared to Mademoiselle Moor."

"What! you sing then?" said Sir Frederic, crossing to Ada.

"Yes! I sing," replied Miss Thomason, calmly.

"Ten thousand thanks!" said Sir Frederic, giving the gloves back to Mademoiselle Moor.

She bowed and turned to Mr. Courtenay. "Will you have the goodness to ring for my Brougham?" she said.

"It is at the door—but your are not going?" exclaimed Sir Frederic.

The German bowed, and went up to Mrs. Thomason, to take leave.

"Miss Thomason, intercede for us—another ballad," said Sir Frederic.

"Well, good morning!" said the German to Ada, taking both her hands.

"I shall see you to-night at Mrs. Anstruther's," said Ada.

"Yes, for half an hour—*Sans adieu!*"

And Mademoiselle Moor gave her hand to Mr. Courtenay, who led her down stairs.

Sir Frederic, instead of attempting to follow, stood wrapt in contemplation before the statue of Ada.

"And so you set off next week, Mr. Warrenne?" said Ada. "I am disposed to envy you."

"But you have been abroad," said Leonard.

"Yes, as far as Naples; but you mean to extend your tour to Greece, do you not?"

"Yes, and I have some thoughts of going on to Egypt," said Leonard.

"But, Mr. Warrenne, oblige me in one thing; don't please publish your tour," said Ada; "it adds so much to one's duties, having to go through a great deal of that kind of reading."

"I can safely promise you that, Miss Tho-

mason," said Leonard. "I have no turn for authorship."

"I don't feel quite sure of you," said Ada; "the Pyramids are very apt to set people off. Do you remember, Charles, all those pictures of Napoleon's career in the Palais Royal?"

"Vile things they were too," said Mr. Courtenay; "I suppose the Pyramids put you in mind of his Egyptian campaign."

"Exactly. If you go to Paris, Mr. Warrenne, don't forget to see the statue of the Duc d'Orleans at Versailles: it is worth the journey."

"And the statue of Velléda, in the gardens of the Luxembourg, which I like still better," said Courtenay.

"Do you like the Jeanne d'Arc?" asked Leonard.

"It is extremely pretty," said Ada; "and I never saw a good cast of it; there's so much more detail in the original, and the hands are very fine."

"I thought that, being a royal production, it had perhaps been over-praised," said Leonard.

"And so it has," replied Courtenay; "there are none of those wonderful emotions that people affect to trace in her face. She is a handsome diffident girl, in a very effective costume; and a good copy of her would look very well, Ada, in the recess at the end of your dining-room."

"Yes, if we could get a good copy," said Ada.

"A very beautiful thing, on my word!" said Sir Frederic, who had been prowling round and about the statue of Ruth all this time.

"It is by an English artist at Rome," said Ada.

"Why, it is yourself!" exclaimed Sir Frederick.

"Didn't you find that out before?" asked Courtenay.

"No, but it's a capital idea, being taken in character; whose thought was it?"

"Mine," said Courtenay; "I always thought a woman with a wet towel thrown over her shoulder a ridiculous subject for the chisel; but here the drapery and the attitude are both called for by the subject."

"A wet towel!" said Ada, laughing; "that is so like Charles; because you know, Mr. Warrenne, that sculptors damp the cloth with which they cast their draperies."

"Oh! Courtenay, "I'll tell you a piece of news, if you haven't seen the papers this morning," said Sir Frederick.

"Well, out with it," returned Mr. Courtenay.

"Old Reynolds has just landed, and has brought with him a wife and two children."

"You don't say so; two children?"

"Married a widow, with two children, just before he left India. An agreeable surprise to the fair Florence," said Sir Frederic.

"Do her all the good in the world!" returned Courtenay.

"Well, then, I am quite ashamed of Mr. Reynolds, and I think he has been doing a very unjust thing" said Mrs. Thomason, who had hitherto been sighing over her knitting in a manner peculiar to herself, without seeming to listen to the conversation, "second marriages are all very well where there are no children—people have a right to please themselves; but here's a young woman brought up with the full expectation of keeping her father's house, and I say it is a cruel thing to set a stepmother over her. You may say what you like, Charles, but it is a piece of injustice. It is just as if Mr. Thomason were to marry again, and to bring home some woman to tyrannize over poor Ada!"

And Mrs. Thomason's large white hand, flashing with rubies and diamonds, after a good deal of scuffling in her apron pockets, carried her embroidered handkerchief to her eyes.

"There's rather a substantial obstacle to such a piece of cruelty on my uncle's part," said Courtenay, glancing his keen eye on the well-filled arm chair which contained Mrs. Thomason; "and I trust that poor Miss Reynolds will do what I should recommend to poor Ada in a similar case—look out for a home of her own!"

"She has been doing that too much, and too often, already," said Mrs. Thomason. "I never encouraged much intimacy between her and Ada. I wish my daughter to be civil to everybody; but we must make distinctions. Miss Reynolds is talked of every where; a shocking thing for a young woman to be talked about! I believe, my dear Ada, you were a witness to the shameful way she flirted with Lord Thomas Mortimer, at the last Academy Ball—(a very handsome young man, but the worst character in London). Lord Thomas would not speak to her the other evening at

Lady Jane Lockwood's—he had been intimate with poor Captain O'Neill!"

"Birds of a feather—" said Sir Frederick.

Mrs. Thomason, having unburdened her mind, relapsed into her knitting and sighing.

"Not but what I always thought Thomas Mortimer a very good fellow," added Sir Frederick.

"Does not a 'good fellow' always mean a 'bad man'?" asked Ada.

"Always!" replied Courtenay.

"Now, 'faith, Miss Thomason, that's too severe," said Sir Frederick; "but I must be off. I'm going to see after a bouquet for Mademoiselle Moor. She plays in the Somnambula to-night—on my word, it's an exquisite thing, that statue!"

And Sir Frederic, after going round the statue once more, made a hasty bow all round, and hurried out of the room.

"That's the most singular fellow I ever met with," said Courtenay.

"He seems to have been very active in that shipwreck off the Sussex coast," said Ada.

"Oh yes; he happened to be at Hastings for a day or two, and he thought it the best fun in the world, going out to the wreck and bringing off the passengers," said Courtenay.

"He risked his own life, at any rate," said Ada.

"That he does every day," said Leonard. "It was only the other day that coming home rather tipsy, he drove down the side of a chalk-pit—he said he thought it would be a shorter way home. His horses were killed on the spot; his carriage broken to pieces, and he really escaped with very little injury! He was under my father's care for a few days, and then started off to commit some new follies."

"What a curious person!" said Ada, earnestly.

"Ah! women always like that sort of thing," said Courtenay; "any kind of notoriety, no matter what."

"I don't like it," said Ada; "but one can't help wondering what will be the end of such a person."

"He ought to have broken his neck long ago," said Courtenay.

"He is very much liked on his estate; he is very charitable—often when he has nothing to give," observed Leonard.

"Come, Moonshine—you can't mend that," said Courtenay, rising; "take leave of the ladies, and pray include in your tour a treatise on the new method of being charitable at a small expense."

CHAPTER IV.

He that can lose a kingdom, and not rave
He's a tame jade—I am not.

Marlowe.

In man, of questionable quality
Ambition has been holden; but in woman
Oh! 'tis the veriest beggary of the heart
That winter ever witnessed.

Taylor.

It was a very gay party at Lady Jane Lockwood's, considering the time of year. Florence looked forward to this party for several reasons. She hoped that at the house of her hostess, it would be impossible for her to experience the kind of neglect that she had undergone on her

first appearance after Captain O'Neill's death. And she trusted that Mr. Courtenay would gladly avail himself of the invitation she had playfully given him, and so be brought once more within the sphere of her dangerous charms. She knew that Miss Lockwood was five fathom deep in love with Lord Thomas Mortimer, of whom honourable mention has been made—and that she had neither eyes nor ears for any other person. Miss Lockwood therefore with her golden hair and sleepy hazel eyes, was a very safe person to hold out as an inducement. And Florence while she studded her fair ringlets with pomgranite blossoms, counted with delight on the triumph of bringing Mr. Courtenay to her feet, until she was launched on a gayer world as mistress of her father's establishment. For that day's news had not yet reached her ears—Lady Jane never read the papers, and Florence in planning over her dress for the evening had avoided all morning visiters.

She was quite satisfied with the effect of her dress of scarlet and white gauze—her coiffure was admirable—she was in high beauty again, for she had got over the temporary vexation of Captain O'Neill's suicide—and she pleased herself by thinking as she looked for the last time in her glass, that had she been more culpable than she was in that affair, there were few men who would not pardon every thing to such a form.

As she entered the ball-room, two of her admirers were standing almost in the doorway —Mr. Roxby and Captain Le Grange—they bowed very coldly in reply to her gracious salutation, and stepped back to let her pass. As they had been exceedingly devoted of late, she was struck by their manner, but attributed it to the general feeling against her. They were poor creatures she knew—and if it was the fashion to censure her, they would follow the fashion.

The Thomason party were never very early,

but as soon as they came, Mr. Courtenay sought out Florence.

"Well now, where's Miss Lockwood?" was his first salutation.

"Oh! you *are* come then, Mr. Courtenay," said Florence, "you must wait till after this mazourka to engage Miss Lockwood, for she is dancing now with Lord Thomas Mortimer."

"That young lady in pink—she really is very lovely," said Courtenay, sauntering near the dancers; "will you come and look at them?"

Florence took his arm, and they stood looking on. Not a single glance from Mr. Courtenay at her beautiful dress—not a stray look that betrayed the slightest admiration of her charms.

"She dances very well," he remarked, after a pause.

"I shall tell Miss Lockwood that she has made a conquest of you!" said Florence.

"Do—it will please her;" returned Courtenay.

"That is the vainest speech I have heard a long time," declared Florence.

"How so? She is very unlike other women if it would not please her to add another slave to her train;" said Courtenay.

"I wish I could see you really a slave to any woman!" exclaimed Florence.

"I am afraid your wish is not destined to be gratified," said Courtenay: "will you waltz?"

"If you please," said Florence; "this is a *Deux temps*."

"Very well," said Courtenay; "I see Mademoiselle Moor and Sir Frederic just joining the circle."

Florence almost wondered at herself for accepting so readily such an invitation to dance; she, who had been used to deny, and hesitate, and consult her tablets, before she would grant her hand to the best partner in the room.

After the waltz Courtenay led Florence to a couch where Mademoiselle Moor and Sir Frederick were sitting.

Sir Frederick rose to make room for Florence.

"I say Courtenay," he whispered, "has she heard of the large addition her father has made to her family?"

"I believe not," he replied.

"Ah! it would be a pity to tell her," would not it?"

"Scandalous," said Mr. Courtenay.

"I say, I can't get that statue of your cousin out of my head," said Sir Frederick; "I suppose one could not get a copy of it."

"Not usual," said Courtenay.

"Young Warrenne is going off immediately, is he not?" asked Sir Frederick.

"Yes, I shall miss him, he is a great favourite of mine," said Courtenay.

"Mademoiselle Moor's finale was a perfect triumph, to-night," said Sir Frederick.

"Was it? I congratulate you," said Courtenay.

"It is a pretty play," said the singer, "and that makes one's task easier; the audience are in good-humour beforehand."

"I trust that you will allow me the honour of dancing with you again," said Sir Frederic.

"You are very good; I believe I shall not dance any more," replied the singer.

"If you relent, remember I am at your service," said Sir Frederic; and he went to seek another partner.

"Don't trust to his recollection, but dance this next set with me," said Courtenay.

"I am always willing to dance with Mr. Courtenay," replied the German.

Ada was coming towards them with Mr. Roxby. She wished her cousin to be her vis-a-vis. No one asked Florence to dance. There seemed to be a little difficulty in forming the quadrille, and just at that moment

Captain Le Grange came up. It would have seemed perfectly natural that he should have solicited her hand, instead of which he took the vacant seat on the sofa beside her. He was a most repulsive looking man—with white lips retracted from his teeth like those of a corpse, which gave a look of hideous mockery to his countenance. Florence had always disliked and despised him: but he was in the Guards and very much in London society, and therefore she had thought his admiration worth having, and had given him just encouragement enough to keep him in her train.

He now began by enquiring with a great appearance of interest after her health, which he feared was but indifferent, as she was not dancing.

This sudden interest, so different from his manner when she entered the room, rather surprised her: she replied coldly that she was perfectly well—but that she did not happen to

be in the humour to dance this quadrille:—she did not admire quadrilles.

"I rejoice to hear it," said her companion; "I feared that the excitement however pleasureable, of recent events, might have been too much for you."

This speech appeared to Florence to bear only one interpretation. Captain Le Grange was referring to her feelings upon the death of his friend—and was insolent enough to hint that her emotions were pleasurable on that occasion.

She coloured deeply, but commanded her voice sufficiently to say with indifference, that she could hardly imagine her health affected by events in which she had no possible concern.

"Very true," remarked her companion, mildly; "the principals are the only parties deeply concerned in such transactions—and possibly, you are extremely fond of children?"

Florence looked at him, but there was nothing in his ghastly countenance that

might lead her to suppose that he had been drinking.

"Not particularly fond," she replied coldly.

"Ah!" said he, in a tone of sympathy; "then my congratulations upon the recent marriage in your family must not include the two cherubs."

"You are under some mistake," said Florence; "my family is so limited in number that I am able to contradict such a report positively—there has been no marriage among my connections."

Captain Le Grange was now in a state approaching to extasy; he was actually the first to tell a piece of ill news.

A gleam of vice lit up his evil face.

"You are always in such spirits," he said, laughing faintly. "I dare say it amuses you to contradict it every where!"

"You are quite unintelligible this evening," replied Florence, haughtily.

"It is impossible you should not be aware of your father's marriage with Mrs. Lyle, a widow lady with two children, just before he set sail from Calcutta?" said Captain Le Grange. "It is in to-day's paper!"

For an instant her brain reeled—every trace of colour fled from her face; all her hopes, all her plans of power and triumph, destroyed by the very thought; but she recovered herself in an instant—she had pride enough to nerve her to the effort. She would not give him the gratification of seeing her humbled by his news.

"Some people believe everything they see in the papers," she said, with all the scorn she could throw into her voice and face; "you must permit me to doubt the accuracy of your information."

"Certainly," returned Captain Le Grange, in the most obliging manner. "I am quite sorry—it must be such a pleasure to have a mamma—to say nothing of the little brother

and sister! I am sorry for you, indeed—it ought to be true!"

"Thank you!" said Florence, laughing almost hysterically; her scorn and loathing of the man seemed rising almost beyond control.

"There is a dispute to-night as to which is the most acknowledged belle of the room," said Captain Le Grange, gazing at Florence; "for my part I don't think there is a moment's hesitation on the subject."

Florence, attempting to carry off her agitation by talking, asked him, hurriedly, which were the two beauties of the room.

"Oh! beyond all compare the two handsomest are Miss Lockwood and Miss Thomason," he replied; "but I say that Miss Lockwood is infinitely superior to Miss Thomason: look at her height, her complexion—her *tournure!*"

He would never have dared to praise another woman to Florence before; and it looked like confirmation of his news. She felt

an oppression at the heart that almost forbad her breathing.

"Roxby is wonderfully taken with Miss Thomason," pursued Captain Le Grange; "but then, poor fellow, we all know that the fortune is some inducement in his case."

This from Captain Le Grange, himself a notorious fortune-hunter, was almost ludicrous.

"I have observed the same predilection in several of Mr. Roxby's friends, said Florence, struggling against the stupor that seemed to weigh her down, and looking haughtily at Captain Le Grange; and I have had the pleasure of seeing them thoroughly defeated—a pleasure that I hope frequently to enjoy."

Captain Le Grange was past feeling any confusion; but if he had a retort ready, she did not give him time to use it; she rose and attempted to make her way through the crowd.

"Where are you going?" asked Mr. Courtenay, meeting her, and offering her his arm.

"Anywhere!" she replied, impatiently.

"Let me help you, then," he said; "there's an abominable mob; you will never be able to make your way alone."

He made room for her through the doorway, and lead her into a little reading-room beyond the hall.

"Mr. Courtenay, I am ill," she said, as she sank into a chair gasping for breath. "If you could summon my maid without exciting attention, I should be glad. I wish to get upstairs."

She little knew that all her artifices possessed not a tenth part of the attraction that her genuine unfeigned distress excited in his mind. He threw up the window, and crossed the room to inquire for her maid.

"What's her name?" he asked, as he was going out.

"Louise. But stay; I gave her leave to go to the play to-night; I knew the ball would be late; I must do without her."

"How can you manage? Will you have some one else?" asked Courtenay, coming back to her chair.

She did not answer for some moments, but sat pressing her hand to her forehead; then looking up, she said, eagerly, "But *is* it true?"

"I have no doubt of it," replied Courtenay.

"You saw it in the paper?"

"I was told of it. I seldom look in the papers."

"To suffer me to hear it by chance!" exclaimed Florence, in a tone of indignation.

"A letter from Erlesmede could not reach you till to-morrow," said Courtenay. "I am sure Mrs. Creswick would not leave you in the dark longer than could be helped."

"Will you light me that little lamp," said Florence; "I will try to go up stairs now."

Courtenay lighted it. "Let me say one thing to you," he said, as he gave it into her hand. "You could never have looked on your

father's house as your permanent home; and, therefore, the injury, from the sense of which you are now suffering, is at the worst but temporary."

"You are very good," said Florence, holding out her hand, "I hope I shall be very wise to-morrow."

Not the smile, not the glance, with which she accompanied her words, had the least power to shake his composure.

He took her hand calmly, and led her to the threshold of the door, when a thundering knock echoed through the hall, and Mrs. Creswick stepped into the house.

"You will not announce me, if you please, to-night," she said to the servants who received her; "I see there is a ball going forward. Shew me upstairs, and let Miss Reynolds know I shall be glad to see her."

"Miss Reynolds will be all the better for your company," said Mr. Courtenay, advancing.

"Florence, my dear!" said Mrs. Creswick, affectionately.

"I'm so glad to see you, aunt," said Florence.

"Good night!" said Mr. Courtenay, taking up his hat.

"Was Mr. Courtenay your informant, my love?" asked Mrs. Creswick, when they were alone together in Florence's room.

"No, aunt; I heard it suddenly, and Mr. Courtenay was so good as to take me out of the ball-room."

"I hoped I should have saved you the pain of learning this news by the papers," said Mrs. Creswick. "I set off an hour after your father arrived with his wife at Erlesmede. He had no time to write before he left Calcutta, and the match was concluded in such haste, that the mail by which he last wrote could have brought us no hint of his project.

Florence burst into tears, the first she had shed; and these were not of unmixed sorrow

for her disappointment; there mingled with them some regrets for the way she had often treated her Aunt—her Aunt who had been hurrying up to town to soften the keenness of this intelligence.

"Your father was most anxious that I should explain how impossible it was for him to write to you," said Mrs. Creswick; "he was desirous that you should not feel yourself neglected."

"My father has shown himself solicitous for my happiness!" said Florence, flashing up; I thank him! "He will find that I have taken the lesson to heart!"

"I entreat you, my dear, not to show any resentment in your manner," said Mrs. Creswick, earnestly. "My brother had an undoubted right to please himself; and—you do not know your father—he is the last person to bear anything like disrespect!"

"I will school myself, aunt," said Florence, haughtily; "I shall have time before to-

morrow evening, and my manner shall content even you. I can

> " Look like the innocent flower,
> But be the serpent under it !"

" Florence, my love !" said Mrs. Creswick, taking her hands; " you know where to look for support in affliction—not only for consolation, but for help—for help not only to support the suffering, but to grow wiser under the ordeal. I will leave you, my dear; for there are moments when we are strongest alone."

Mrs. Creswick withdrew, and Florence threw herself on her bed, resolved to lock her heart againt all the world—to return hatred for injury; and to affect indifference, where resistance was of no avail.

CHAPTER V.

All that the proud can feel of pain;
The agony they do not show,
The suffocating sense of woe
Which speaks but in it's loneliness
And then is jealous, lest the sky
Should have a listener, nor will sigh
Until it's voice is echoless.

Byron.

"You will find Mrs. Reynolds a very pleasing young woman, my dear," said Mrs. Creswick, as they were journeying towards Erlesmede the next day; "and her little children are beautiful creatures."

"Does she set up for a beauty herself?" asked Florence.

"She is very pretty," said Mrs. Creswick with a sigh, at the bitterness of her niece's tone.

"What age may she be?"

"About four or five and twenty."

"My rival every way!" thought Florence, "young, pretty, and the mistress of my father's house."

Like many of those exquisitely fair women, Florence possessed a great deal of decision, and character; she had great powers of endurance, very seldom gave way to tears; was personally courageous; and by no means deficient in intellect. All her bad qualities had been pampered and fostered at school—her artifice, her vanity, her selfishness—but she had a heart, and she was almost sensible of it for the first time, when she felt herself drawn towards her aunt. Mrs. Creswick was some one on whom she could rely—she had never wronged her—never deceived her—and in spite of her own ungracious behaviour, she felt assured of her sympathy, in this first trial of her life.

She now arranged her plans of action, and nerved herself to go through the approaching meeting with a resolution which in a better cause would have been heroic.

As they neared Erlesmede, Mrs. Creswick pressed her hand.

"I fear for you, my dear;" she said, in an anxious tone.

"Watch me, aunt," said Florence, calmly; "you will detect nothing in my manner."

"It is so difficult to feign," said Mrs. Creswick.

"Not to me," returned Florence.

Although it was quite dusk when they drove up to the house, there were two figures walking on the terrace—one by his height Florence knew to be Colonel Creswick—the other she supposed, her father.

They both came directly to the carriage door. Florence got out first, and found herself in her father's arms.

"Florence, my love."

"My dear father!"

He kissed her and led her rapidly across the hall into the drawing-room—the little colonel hopping after them, full of solicitude as to whether "Dearest Madam" was cold, or tired, or hungry.

Mrs. Reynolds was seated by the fire. She rose as her husband approached, leading Florence.

"Mrs. Reynolds, let me present my daughter to you," he said.

Florence embraced her with the most natural air in the world.

"I am delighted to see you," said Mrs. Reynolds, in a low soft voice, "Mr. Reynolds I really must compliment you on your daughter!"

"People will be apt to quarrel with Mr. Reynolds, Madam," said the colonel, approaching Mrs. Reynolds, "he has monopolised so much beauty and grace—but I doubt not

that some fortunate man will persuade him to divide his treasures."

"Yes—that will be the end of it, I dare say," said Mrs. Reynolds, glancing with a smile at Florence.

Mr. Reynolds did not seem to hear them. He stood with his arm round Florence, gazing earnestly and admiringly at her.

"And this is *little* Florence," he said at last, as if recalling to himself the waxen beauty he had sent over to England at five years of age.

"Surely," thought Mrs. Creswick, "she must be touched by his manner."

Florence *was* touched, though she tried to shake off the feeling.

"I think we shall be encroaching on your dinner-hour, Colonel Creswick," said she, "it is almost six, and Louise is not the most speedy of tirewomen."

"I think we may prevail on the gentlemen to dispense with our toilets to-day," said Mrs. Creswick.

The colonel made a bow almost as low as the cushion of his chair, while he expressed his acquiescence in Mrs. Creswick's suggestion.

When they were seated at table Florence had time to survey her new-found relatives. Mrs. Reynolds was a graceful-looking young woman, with an olive complexion, and the softest possible dark eyes and hair. She was expensively dressed, and there was a pretty helplessness about her that was very agreeable to gentlemen.

Mr. Reynolds resembled his sister, although his features were more regular; indeed, in his youth he must have been remarkably handsome. But the character of severity which might be sometimes traced in her countenance, was revealed in all its rigour on his. The rigid lines of his firmly closed mouth, and the determination expressed in his dark brow, gave an air of unpleasing sternness to his face in repose.

Florence was anxious to make out the degree of influence that Mrs. Reynolds had over her

father; but she was quite misled if she formed any opinion on the subject from the amount of fondness he might display towards his wife. He avoided systematically all show of emotion. and she would have known how to value his reception of herself, had she been aware of the proportion between his feelings and their expression.

"I must take an early opportunity of calling on Mr. Warrenne," said Mr. Reynolds. "I promised his son that I would do so. And I owe to Dr. Warrenne obligations that I can never repay."

"That dear Dr. Warrenne!" interposed Mrs. Reynolds.

Mr. Reynolds went on to explain that Mrs. Reynolds (then Mrs. Lyle) and her son had been dangerously ill of a fever somewhere up the country, and that Dr. Warrenne had attended them with such unremitting care, that under Providence, they owed to him the preservation of their lives.

"Very good news for Mr. Warrenne," said Mrs. Creswick.

"And it was not only his skill, though I think him wonderfully clever," said Mrs. Reynolds, "but he was so kind to poor little Edward; he used to sit nursing him in the verandah for hours, when he got better, looking at those travelling jugglers with their goats."

"You shall introduce me, Florence," said Mr. Reynolds; you know the young ladies, of course?"

"Oh! Dr. Warrenne was so fond of talking of his sisters," said Mrs. Reynolds; "he was sadly home-sick sometimes."

"There's another son, is there not?" asked Mr. Reynolds.

"Yes; he was in Mr. Thomason's house; but his father has lately withdrawn him, on account of his health, I believe; and he is about to travel," said Mrs. Creswick.

"It does not seem very prudent to withdraw a young man from a situation," unless

you have another ready for him," remarked Mr. Reynolds; "but he will always command my best interest, for his brother's sake."

"He appeared in perfect health when I saw him the other night at the Thomason's," said Florence. "I always understood that he had resigned his situation at Mr. Thomason's, in order to marry Mrs. Digby.

"Not very probable, my dear," said Mrs. Creswick.

"Not probable, indeed," said Mr. Reynolds, looking stern.

Florence wondered what she had said to disturb her father's composure.

"Here come the little ones!" said Mrs. Creswick, as a servant entered, leading two beautiful children. The little girl was dark, like her mother, with chestnut rings of hair curling all over her head, and the warm, sunny complexion of a peach. The boy, still more beautiful, with dark eyes, and long golden ringlets. There was no silly fuss with the

children. Mrs. Reynolds held out her hand to the boy, and the girl crept up to Mr. Reynolds, and was lifted on his knee. And then the boy struggled away from his mamma, and climbed up on the other knee. Mrs. Reynolds looked much gratified at her husband's fondness for her children—indeed, from the time they appeared, he seemed to see and think of nothing else. He cut an orange for Lucy, and gave Edward some glittering bon-bons on the side of his own plate, and pretended to look another way when the boy stooped and sipped from his full wine-glass, while his bright eyes wandered round the table to see if he was observed.

"Papa!" said Lucy, "there is a frost to-night; Harley says perhaps there will be ice to-morrow."

"You have never seen ice?" enquired Florence, who thought it wisest to conciliate the parents by noticing the children, while her heart trembled with anger at hearing them call her father "Papa."

"Never," said Lucy; "and I am to see Papa skate, he says; if he has not forgotten it."

"Ah! my little Lucy, you must not depend on my skating," said Mr. Reynolds.

"I dare say you never were cold until you came to England," said Florence still addressing Lucy.

"Oh! sometimes, on board ship; but oh! we were all so cold coming from Southampton; mamma and papa were cold, and Edward got under papa's cloak at the bottom of the carriage."

"Edward had the best of it," said Mr. Reynolds, stroking his long hair.

"Papa," said Edward, "there's a little white dog in this house."

"Aye, indeed?" said Mr. Reynolds.

"And Harley says I must not pinch him," added the child.

This remark almost looked as if he had tried the experiment. Florence could hardly

keep silence. Her Fidelio to serve as *bête de souffrance* to those odious children!

"Pinch him! I should think not indeed!" said Mr. Reynolds; "but I dare say you may play with him if you are very good."

"I could hardly undertake to answer for Fidelio's temper," said Florence, speaking calmly by a great effort; "he requires a great deal of managing, and he makes a point of snapping at visiters if they touch him."

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Reynolds, "I would not have Edward go near that dog; recollect, my darling!"

Mrs. Creswick, who seemed to guess that her niece's patience was wearing rather thin, now rose to leave the room; Mrs. Reynolds, with a child in each hand, leading the way.

"Do you work, Mrs. Reynolds?" asked Mrs. Creswick, drawing towards her her little ebony table with its shaded lamp and working implements.

"No. Do you know my eyes are so bad

I don't ever venture to work," said Mrs. Reynolds. "At least my sight is indifferent; I am always rather afraid of becoming near-sighted."

"That must likewise be a drawback to reading by candle-light," said Mrs. Creswick.

"Yes; but I seldom read. In the morning I have no time, and in the evening there are gentlemen; and then a little music, or perhaps cards."

"You play then," said Mrs. Creswick.

"Yes; I sing to the guitar; I think gentlemen prefer singing. Lucy—Edward, my pet, Harley is waiting; come and kiss mamma, and say good-night to Mrs. Creswick."

The children were dismissed, much to the relief of Florence, who found it difficult to endure the presence of the little usurpers; though it was evident that they were well-trained, obedient children, and beautiful enough to prepossess most persons in their favour.

While Mrs. Creswick and Mrs. Reynolds kept up a desultory conversation together, Florence had time to think over her position and her plans for the future.

She determined (as she had done the first moment she heard the news of her father's marriage) with regard to her position, that it was unbearable; the next thing to be determined was her escape. This was only to be effected through her marriage; and she passed in review the few pretenders to her hand who yet remained constant enough to give her a hope.

Captain Le Grange was too insufferable; she feared that Mr. Roxby had gone over to Miss Thomason; and then he had actually nothing. Mr. Courtenay, he was well off, and had great expectations—but no, he would not do—he was too rigid—too strict; she hoped she might subdue him, but she could not venture to marry him. Perhaps, with a little management, she might secure Lord Thomas

Mortimer, if no unlucky chance enlightened her father as to his character. And then she reverted with a sigh to Leonard Warrenne, whose principles, and temper, and intellect, were such as would bear investigation, and—who had loved her for herself.

"Where are the children?" said Mr. Reynolds to his wife, when the gentlemen joined them in the drawing-room.

"Gone to bed this half-hour," replied Mrs. Reynolds; "little Edward was quite tired."

"They seem sweet, tractable creatures," said Mrs. Creswick.

"They are not spoiled, Agatha," said Mr. Reynolds.

Florence was recalled from her reverie by the unwonted sound of her aunt's name; she was just thinking that if she became Lady Thomas Mortimer, she would be so fortunate as to take precedence of Mrs. Reynolds, when her father sat down beside her, and said—

"You and I, my dear, have to make acquaintance with each other."

She sat upright, smiled becomingly, and waited to hear what he would say.

"My plan is to go to Town for this season," he pursued, "and then to purchase a place in this neighbourhood. I question if London would agree with Mrs. Reynolds' health for any length of time; and the children, also, will be better in the country."

They are to be considered first, thought Florence. I have only to hope that this season will do my business.

"So that whatever masters you wish to profit by, my dear, I shall gladly furnish you with during the ensuing season. Music and painting, I suppose, you will be anxious to learn; but whatever graver studies you desire to pursue, it will give me pleasure to afford you the opportunity."

"You are all kindness," said Florence, re-

straining her indignation at being considered as a school girl.

"With regard to language, now," said Mr. Reynolds; "you are acquainted with French and Italian, of course?"

"Certainly," replied Florence.

"Can you converse fluently in both those languages?" asked her father.

"Not in Italian," said Florence. "I learned as much as the other girls. I know very well how to translate a song."

"Then you have an agreeable pursuit before you," said her father, "in perfecting yourself in that language; it is possible that we may winter in Italy, and then you will find the value of your acquirement."

"I hope before that time," thought Florence, "to be beyond your jurisdiction."

"I dare say you are aware," continued her father, who interpreted the smiling grace of her manner into perfect acquiescence, "that the education we receive at school is valueless

compared to that which we give ourselves in after life; yours is now beginning — and I think you are singularly fortunate that you have leisure to form your character and intellect, instead of being compelled thus early to direct your powers to the management of a large establishment."

"Perhaps," said Florence, with the sweetest simplicity, "you had a view, most kindly, to my benefit, in your present marriage."

"That consideration was not without its influence upon my decision," said her father, gravely; "a girl placed at the head of a house, occupies a very false position—and is liable to become spoiled by attentions which are paid to her situation and not to herself."

"And no doubt," said Florence, modestly, "Mrs. Reynolds will have the kindness to assist me in forming my plans of study, for I fancied I had done with learning when I left school, and I fear I should be quite awkward in setting about it again."

This was said maliciously, for Florence detected that Mrs. Reynolds had a very common kind of mind, though it was evident that she had some idea of right and wrong, and had done her best in training her children. But Mr. Reynolds did not appear embarrassed by the request.

"Mrs. Reynolds is a mother," he said, "and her children have the first claim upon her care. *I* shall be glad to give you every assistance, and, above all, to put you upon a course of reading which will strengthen your mind and enlarge your views. In history, for instance, it is scarcely possible but that you have still much to learn?"

"Poor Florence! in history, except a few names sadly jumbled together in her head, she had *all* to learn; and in everything that related to literature, she was equally uninformed—and she detested study; she always had done so—but now, when she had expected to be launched upon the world, admired and

envied, to be calmly told that she had to begin her education! Many and deep were the vows that she breathed to accept the very first man, rich enough, and docile enough, who should offer to free her from her bondage. To her infinite relief Mrs. Reynolds was rising to retire—she siezed the candle which the polite little Colonel was lighting for her, and hastened to her room — to think and be wretched.

CHAPTER VI.

Wo.—Oh! when did you see her?

First Fr.—How he looks!

Jai.—This morning?

Wo.—Was she well? was she in health? when did she sleep?

Jai.—I do not think she was very well. But what of her, Sir?

Wo.—Nothing but my pity.

Two Noble Kinsmen.

About the same time that Miss Reynolds was so suddenly recalled from London to make the acquaintanee of her father and his family, Leonard came down to Erlesmede to take leave of his father and sisters, to bid farewell to Mrs. Digby, and to make a few hasty arrangements for his travels.

There was something of solemnity in Mrs. Digby's farewell interview with Leonard. She mentioned to him several improvements which she should wish carried out on her estate in case she did not live to complete them; recommended to him several old pensioners who though their little income was secured to them would be cheered by a continuance of the kindness she had hitherto shown them, and expressed her conviction that she was resigning her responsibilities into worthy hands. He was much affected by the tone of her parting admonitions; for there was nothing in his disposition of that avarice which forms so leading a feature in the characters of the rising generation; her liberality had enabled him to gratify his warmest wishes in seeing foreign countries; and he sincerely desired that it might be many years before he should be called upon to fill her place.

It has been said that his plans occasioned a good deal of discussion in the village. He

little imagined that he was a person of sufficient importance to excite any interest whatever by the apparent mystery of his proceedings; but in the meantime people went on wondering why he had left Mr. Thomason's—on which side the discontent had originated—what he meant to do next—who was to pay for his travels, and other matters with which (it might occur to a bystander) they had nothing at all to do. Mr. Warrenne was so perfectly candid in his disposition that he would most likely have at once relieved the anxieties of his neighbours respecting his son's prospects, if he had not been restrained by Mrs. Digby's wishes on the subject.

Florence shared in the general curiosity. She had never seriously believed that there was the least probability of a marriage between Leonard and Mrs. Digby, and she felt, though she had no reasonable grounds for her belief, that, somehow or other, his position in life was altered, and that the homage he had once

been presumptuous in offering would now be acceptable. Perhaps, she even went so far as to think, in the present disasterous state of her affairs, it might be possible for her to be brought to think of marrying him. She had always preferred him to every one else—her father must of course make her a handsome allowance, though he had so cruelly robbed her of her birthright; they might manage to live very comfortably, and at least she should be delivered from the presence of that odious Mrs. Reynolds and her children.

She was indulging in this reverie on the morning after her arrival at Erlesmede, and had almost forgotten the presence of the obnoxious individuals at the breakfast-table, when she was roused by the soft voice of Mrs. Reynolds, saying to little Lucy, as she held out her jewelled hand,—

"Shall I trouble you, dear, for the cream jug?"

Florence came to the child's assistance;

and Mr. Reynolds said, gravely, to the little girl,—

"You should always be on the watch at table, and not suffer your mamma to ask twice for anything."

The child coloured, and Florence felt an undefined sense of awe at her father's manner. He seemed a person who would overlook nothing, and who would exact from all who surrounded him an absolute submission to his will.

"You shall introduce us this morning to Mr. Warrenne and his family," said Mr. Reynolds, addressing her.

"I shall be very happy," returned Florence.

"It will be agreeable to Mrs. Reynolds," he added, inclining his head towards her.

"Oh! I shall be *so* delighted," said Mrs. Reynolds, rising; "as soon as I have seen Harley about the children's frocks, I will put on my bonnet and join you."

"We will take care to be ready," returned Mr. Reynolds.

Florence, trembling with anger, caught Mrs. Creswick's eye, and refrained from speaking; she was on the very verge of saying that she would not accompany them.

Mr. Warrenne was gone out upon his rounds when the Reynolds party called at his house. Leonard did not appear, and Maud and Alice were obliged to entertain their guests as they best might. Mrs. Reynolds seemed soon to become familiar with Maud. Music was a subject upon which they agreed. Mrs. Reynolds promised to shew Maud her guitar, and got up to try the seraphine. This brought Alice forward; she rose to open the instrument, and at the request of Mrs. Reynolds, she played a sacred air.

Mrs. Reynolds then sat down, and amused herself by trying a few chords upon the keys.

"It is so sweet; do listen Mr. Reynolds," she said. "I should think now, this was just the sort of music to charm you."

"Do you think you should like such an instrument?" said Mr. Reynolds.

"Oh! I am wild to have one. I declare I could steal your's my dear Miss Alice, with all the pleasure in the world!"

"You shall find one ready for you in Portman-square," said Mr. Reynolds, without any inflexion of his hard unbending manner.

"A thousand thanks—you are so *very* kind!" returned Mrs. Reynolds, evidently pleased; but so used to be petted and waited upon, that she received such marks of attention as the natural tribute to her charms. "Do you know," she added, "you must not think me rude, but I'm going to take my bonnet off; I do so object to sitting long in a bonnet; and then, my dear Miss Alice, I'm going to beg for another tune."

The bonnet, with its trailing sprig of wild convolvolus, was laid on the table, the gloves thrown beside it; and then Mrs. Reynolds, drawing her chair almost into the fire, and rest-

ing her clasped hands on her knee, composed herself alternately to talk and to listen.

"And so your brother is not at home," she said, turning to Maud; "I do so regret it; I hear he is charming—I cannot think who told me so. Was it you, dear Florence?"

"No," replied Florence, coldly turning towards her step-mother; "I am not aware of having mentioned Mr. Leonard Warrenne."

"It is quite a pity he is going to travel, because he might have sung glees so nicely with us," continued Mrs. Reynolds. "How sweet that movement is; Mozart, I suppose, Miss Alice, and very difficult. What a finished musician you are!"

"I thought as much," said Mr. Reynolds, who had been listening with grave attention.

"You are very lenient to me," said Alice, moving quietly from the instrument; "music is my one amusement, and therefore it would be strange if I could not play with tolerable ease."

"I declare I have not asked you if you were musical, dear Florence?" said Mrs. Reynolds.

"Oh dear, no," replied Florence. "I had always imagined that proficiency in those things was exclusively the province of professional people."

"This young lady," said Mr. Reynolds, looking at Alice, "teaches you that a high degree of excellence can be attained in private life."

Florence dared not reply.

"Now, I think Mrs. Reynolds," said Mr. Reynolds, making a slight movement with his hat, which he carried in his hand.

"This moment," said Mrs. Reynolds, taking her bonnet from Maud; "I'm going, though very unwillingly, I do assure you. That darling seraphine! Do come soon, my dear Miss Warrenne; I long to show you my children."

"And I am so fond of children," said Maud; "I shall be delighted to see them."

"Oh! but perhaps you could come back

with me," said Mrs. Reynolds; "I dare say Mr. Reynolds would not mind waiting a minute while you put on your things."

"It would give me pleasure," said Mr. Reynolds, with his usual gravity. "I should like to present the little ones to Miss Warrenne, particularly little Edward, who owes so much to her brother's kindness."

Maud could not but acquiesce in so polite an arrangement. She hurried up stairs to dress;—at the landing she was met by her brother Leonard.

"Oh! Leonard dear, I'm in a hurry;" said she, trying to pass him as she spoke

"Are they gone?" he asked.

"No—down stairs, waiting for me."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"Going back to the Ferns to see the children."

"About Miss Reynolds," said Leonard, still interposing between his sister and the door of her room.

"I can't wait *indeed*, dear!" exclaimed Maud.

"No, but Maud, one moment—how does she look?"

"Oh! very well—no, very ill."

"Ill!"

"No—only rather pale—run down and see —I must go and dress!"

Maud escaped into her room, and Leonard leaning against the doorway pursued his enquiries while she folded her shawl.

"Maud!—does she look unhappy?"

"Very sulky, dear."

"You were always severe upon her!" exclaimed Leonard.

"You asked me;" said Maud, tying her bonnet.

"Does she appear to be suffering from this marriage of her father's?" pursued Leonard.

"I'm sure I don't know," returned Maud; "if I were you I would pop my head in at the door and judge for myself!"

"I think you might feel for her under these circumstances," said Leonard.

"One would suppose you were in love with her," said Maud, looking for her gloves, "she is the last person I should think of feeling for; —so good-bye."

Maud hurried down to join her friends. Leonard went back to his own room, and Alice left to herself, re-opened the seraphine, and sat down to one of Mozart's Masses.

She had been playing some time without interruption when the drawing-room door was thrown open by Dinah, with the announcement of—"Mr. Scudamore."

Alice left the seraphine, and moved gracefully towards the new comer, without the slightest trace of blindness in her gestures except a trifling movement of her left hand which served to warn her if there was any furniture in her way.

"How do you do, grandfather?" she said, holding out her beautiful little pink hand; "I

hope you have grace enough to be ashamed to look me in the face, after having forgotten these three weeks to bring me my jonquil and hyacinth roots."

Her hand was taken, and at the same moment she coloured the brightest crimson, and drew it hastily away.

"Mr. Scudamore!" she exclaimed.

"A little mistake, Mistress Alice," said Mr. Scudamore, stepping forward, and shaking hands with her cordially; "you got hold of the wrong person;—it was only Dick—that's all!"

The time in which he pronounced "that's all" was amusing—as if the universe contained nothing that could equal him.

At the same moment her hand was gently taken again—only just touched—and she was led to a chair—while a voice whose peculiar tone thrilled in her ear, said—

"I see, Miss Warrenne, it is in vain for me to attempt to pass for my father at present."

"This is Alice, you know," said Mr. Scudamore, by way of introduction—"that's Dick. But where the deuce is Queen Maud?"

"I expect her back from the Ferns every minute," said Alice:—then with a sweetness of manner that supplied the place in her of a knowledge of etiquette, she said—"I hope Captain Scudamore you have found a chair, for I know you ought not to be standing."

"But I say," exclaimed Mr. Scudamore, interrupting the thanks which his son seemed to have some difficulty in making audible, "this won't do—the days draw in so quickly now, we shall have it dark before Queen Maud comes back!"

"But dear grandfather," said Alice, drawing her chair closer to the table, and feeling for her basket of cotton fringe,—"I suppose you will allow that even in the dark Maud might cross over from the lodge to our garden-gate without running any great danger."

"Oh! as to that," said Mr. Scudamore,

with a disappointed air, "but this owl-light is not what I—eh, Dick?"

Captain Scudamore did not answer. He remained gazing on Alice with an emotion of pity and delight that kept him silent. He had on his first entrance supposed her to be Maud, from her singular beauty, and because he had detected no sign of blindness in her movements. And now, the excessive softness of her complexion, the gentleness of her manner, the sweet tones of her voice, and the touching helplessness of her deprivation, seemed to him to combine all that is most bewitching in woman.

The silence remained unkroken for some minutes, except by the slight sound of the fringe which was weaving rapidly beneath the practised fingers of Alice. The first interruption that occurred was the entrance of Leonard, who, hearing that the Scudamores were below, ran down stairs, hurried into the room, shook hands with the father, congratulated the

son (it was his first appearance out of doors), stirred up the fire, transferred Alice and her basket to the sofa, took possession of her chair, and set in for a gossip.

Alice now began to enjoy herself: sitting in the corner weaving quietly, and as she thought unnoticed, she could listen again to that peculiar voice which had so struck her in the few words she had yet heard from Captain Scudamore.

There are very few people who speak in tune, or who have a tolerable quality of voice in speaking; and Alice, as a blind person, was extremely sensitive to the tone of voice; she formed her opinion of people very much from this single particular, and she fancied she could detect feeling and candour in the clear vibrating intonation of Captain Scudamore; not from anything he said, for they were talking on the commonest subjects.

"And how is Mrs. Thorns?" said Leonard.

"Pretty well, considering that she under-

went a scene this morning, with the rat-catcher. She deposed to his bringing a stock of dead rats with him, and claiming so much a-head for his work as if they had perished under his ferrets in our barns."

"A common trick enough," said Leonard, laughing. "How did it end?"

"Oh! it ended of course in paying the fellow his demand and sending him away, and then unburdening her mind to Jack Robins and myself on the growing depravity of the lower classes. I directly undertook to answer for the perfectibility of human nature in general, and rat-catchers in particular; and we three plunged into a course of metaphysics in the wood-yard."

"Ha! there's Queen Maud," exclaimed Mr. Scudamore, starting up as a clear voice and a rapid step were heard in the hall; "Leonard, stir up the fire! Let's have a blaze! Now, Dick! here she is, my boy!"

As he uttered these last words, he threw

the door back to its very furthest extent, met Maud as she reached the threshold, and led her triumphantly into the very middle of the room.

"How very rude you are, grandfather!" said Maud, disengaging her hand from Mr. Scudamore. Captain Scudamore rose, and bowed. She returned his salutation with a brilliant smile, hoped he was quite recovered, went up to Alice and examined the progress of her fringe, and then turning to Mr. Scudamore, she desired him to be very entertaining in her absence, for that it was requisite she should go and take off her bonnet.

She was back before any one else could have been; with her shining hair smoothed, her colour heightened by the haste she had made, and her eyes sparkling like jewels by the firelight. She made room for herself between Alice and Mr. Scudamore, leaned back, unfolded her handkerchief, and after a brief pause, during which she seemed to recover breath after her exertions, she said—

"Now, I am going to tell you all about the little Lyles!"

"First of all, Queen Maud, I am going to tell *you* that we dine here," interrupted Mr. Scudamore.

"Extremely glad, only I took that for granted; so don't put me out," said Maud. "You never did, I suppose, Mr. Scudamore, and I'm sure, Leonard, *you* never did in all your life see such exquisite children!"

"Are you fond of children, Miss Warrenne?" asked Captain Scudamore.

"Oh! very—at least of pretty ones—I can't think what ugly children were made for!" said Maud. "And I wonder what keeps Papa so late! have you any idea, Leonard, where he is gone?"

"To Mrs. Digby's, as usual," replied Leonard.

"I hate that common!" said Maud, with energy—a dreary, blank road, with not a house

to be seen—just the place where accidents always happen, grandfather."

"And such a high-mettled racer as the white horse adds to the probability," said Mr. Scudamore, laughing.

"I wish I could hear his step," returned Maud. Hark! I believe there he is! Now, I wonder whether Karl is in the way to take the horse! I hope they haven't sent him into the village on any of their pottering errands!"

The sound of a horse's hoofs scrambling on the gravel, decided her at least to go and see. She darted from the room to the entrance, and presently her voice was heard exchanging scraps of German with Karl, and questioning her father about the length of his ride.

"How would you do for a soldier's wife?" asked Mr. Scudamore, looking delightedly at her as she re-entered the room, leaning on her father's arm.

Maud, affecting not to hear this question, merely remarked that she believed the dinner

was ready. Karl's grotesque head at the door seemed to confirm this suggestion.

"Well, then," said Mr. Scudamore, stepping a little back, as if to give his son an opportunity of offering his arm.

"Eh!" what have I done, grandfather?" said Maud; "don't you mean to give me your arm?"

"You termagant!" said Mr. Scudamore, placing her at the head of the table. "I believe you have a pleasure in thwarting me."

"Far from it, Mr. Scudamore," said Maud, leaning back in her chair; "I am going, or rather Leonard is going, to send you some soup."

Captain Scudamore, on the other side of her, offered his services.

"No; I think I won't bore you," replied Maud. "Leonard always carves for me when he is at home."

"And what is Queen Maud going to have?" asked Mr. Scudamore, seeing that

Maud still leaned back in her chair unemployed.

"Thank you, grandfather; but when the partridges come perhaps I may be tempted; the truth is I dined off gingerbread nuts at the Ferns with the little Lyles, just before I had the pleasure of seeing you."

"Gingerbread nuts!" exclaimed Mr. Scudamore.

"Not so much to your taste as beefsteaks, said Maud; "but" (seeing Mr. Warrenne look anxiously at her over the top of the meat cover before him), she added, "you must know the little Lyles have a doll's house, furnished exactly like a real house, complete dinner service, not much bigger than walnut-shells; they were making a feast for their dolls with these said gingerbread nuts on the little plates—(the prettiest things, Alice; we never had such toys; I suppose they were not invented in our time)—and they insisted on my sharing the feast; so we all sat round on the floor in front

of the doll's house, and dispatched the cakes, making appropriate dialogues for the dolls all the time. I never saw Mrs. Creswick laugh so much; how she enjoys those children! And that is the reason, Mr. Scudamore, why I do not wish for a second dinner."

Mr. Warrenne did not seem quite satisfied with this explanation, and murmured something about its being a bad plan to eat gingerbread just before dinner; but Mr. Scudamore, who when he admired a person admired all they did, looked expressively from her to his son, as if to convey his approval of her conduct.

Maud had heard Captain Scudamore's name so often mentioned, that she could not fail to have formed some idea to herself of his appearance. She had most unreasonably associated him in her mind's eye with Mrs. Digby, simply because her father was attending them both at the same time; and had pictured them a couple of nervous invalids, who coddled themselves excessively, spoke in whispers, and

looked very yellow. She was not herself more unlike Mrs. Digby than Captain Scudamore to the portrait her fancy had drawn of him. He was decidedly handsomer than his father—more stately in his bearing—more accurate in the sculptured outline of his features. There was something intelligent and serene in the expression of his large blue eyes, and his address was perfectly devoid of affectation. He gave freer expression to his thoughts than is usual with men who have been much about in the world, and was well informed, without having attended much to literary topics.

"You knew Mrs. Reynolds in India, did you not, Captain Scudamore?" asked Maud.

"Mrs. Lyle I knew very well; I have not seen her since she became Mrs. Reynolds," said Captain Scudamore. "She was a very pleasant woman; but these second marriages——"

"You don't like them!" said Maud, eagerly.

"They are so mortifying to one's vanity,"

said Captain Scudamore, smiling, "to see a woman take another husband as she would another butler when the place becomes vacant —the first respectable man whose character answers—one feels it may be one's own case some day; and I was well acquainted with Lyle, who was an excellent fellow."

"He will marry a widow," said Mr. Scudamore, looking very mischievously at Maud, as if he wished her to be made uncomfortable by the assertion; "it is always the way with fellows when they rail against such things."

Maud nodded her acquiescence; and Leonard exclaimed hastily,

"But you have not yet seen *Miss* Reynolds!" and then stopped as abruptly, confused with having made the remark.

"That pleasure's to come," said Captain Scudamore, turning quickly towards him as he spoke, "and in the meantime you can tell me what to expect."

"That he can!" said Mr. Scudamore.

"I believe she is thought very handsome," said Leonard, busying himself with the chestnuts on his plate.

Maud and Captain Scudamore smiled; Alice looked uneasy.

"And when do you find yourself in Paris, Master Leonard?" asked Mr. Scudamore.

"The day after to-morrow, I hope," said Leonard.

"It is a pity," said Mr. Warrenne, addressing Captain Scudamore, "that, as you have never seen Paris, you could not have arranged to go with my boy."

"I could not afford it," said Captain Scudamore; "that is," he added with a smile, "I could not afford the time, my stay in England being limited, I should grudge losing even a few weeks of my father's company; and I am sure nothing would ever move *him* to Paris."

Maud, who had just risen, and was going out of the room hand-in-hand with Alice, paused to give Mr. Scudamore a look and

smile, which made him follow her just outside the door, and hold her back while he whispered, "Well now, Queen Maud, what do you think of him?"

"I shall not tell you, grandfather; I shall keep my opinion secret," she answered with a provoking smile.

"Oh, you plague!" returned Mr. Scudamore; "you know what he thinks of you—what every body must, who sees you."

"Certainly," replied Maud, with a slight touch of irony in her voice; "you and I, grandfather, have only to be seen to be admired."

When the sisters were alone in the drawing-room, they sat in silence for some time; at last Alice said, as if to herself, "I wonder whether he will soon see her."

"Who is to be seen, dear?" asked Maud.

"If Captain Scudamore will see Miss Reynolds," said Alice, colouring deeply as she spoke.

"He will have the honour sooner or later,

of course," said Maud; "all the sooner, because he hears that she is a beauty."

"I don't think she deserves——" said Alice, and then she stopped in confusion.

"The homage of Captain Scudamore?" asked Maud, laughing. "She will have it though, you may depend; she is, as Leonard says, irresistible!"

"But we don't know that he is so weak, Maud," pleaded Alice: "we have no right to suppose,——"

"Have we not?" interrupted Maud; "why I know a much more remarkable instance of her power. Leonard told me that Mr. Courtenay, who began at Erlesmede by treating her with the coldest neglect, was paying attention to her before she left London; and Mr. Courtenay is a very superior person, I should imagine, to Captain Scudamore!"

"You don't seem pleased with Captain Scudamore after all," said Alice.

"Oh, I dare say he is a good sort of a man," replied Maud, with indifference.

"Leonard said he was handsome," remarked Alice.

"Handsome?—oh! he is handsome enough," returned Maud, laughing. "But wait and see if his beauty will protect him against Miss Reynold's charms! No, my dear Alice, depend upon it we shall see him hobbling up to those green gates every morning, with a bouquet as large as his hat; for he does hobble, and that you can't deny!"

CHAPTER VII.

Ant. Wrangling queen!
Whom everything becomes; to chide, to laugh,
To weep—whose every passion fully strives
To make itself, in thee, fair and admired!
Anthony and Cleopatra.

"He has done it! I said so! He has been! I saw him go into the Ferns this very minute, bouquet and all," cried Maud, running in from the garden, all animation, to her sister, who sat by the fire working. "I knew he would! He dined there yesterday, and this morning, *voilà!* She has made short work! sad havoc with poor Captain Scudamore's heart in one little evening! I'm so glad, because you know

I said it would be so!" And Maud took the chair on the other side of the fire-place, drew off her garden gloves, loosened her shawl, and set to work in good earnest upon some useful fabric which she drew from a basket that stood on the ground beside her. "I have sowed all those seeds in the long border," she continued, "and at twelve Karl is coming to move the rose-bushes, and then I shall make him give Edward and Lucy a ride in his barrow. The wind is very cold, though, Alice dear, I'm perished!" And then Maud paused to warm her hands for a minute at the fire, and to laugh again at the recollection of Captain Scudamore.

"You saw him go in then, Maud," said Alice, in a quiet tone.

"I did, by this token, that he was on horseback, and therefore did no credit to my second sight, which depicted him, if you remember, hobbling along with a walking-stick."

"Did he see you?" asked Alice.

"Not he, my dear; he has no eyes at present except for one object, and a very handsome object too, though no friend of ours."

"And the bouquet, Maud?"

"Why, dear, the bouquet was problematical; seeing that it was wrapped up in a scroll of white paper; but I know the grandfather has crocusses and anemones blown—and 'Dick' no doubt would pillage them all, rather than not carry an offering to the queen of his soul."

Now, it happened that during the three days which had intervened between Maud's prophecy and its fulfilment, Captain Scudamore had managed to spend the best part of each morning with the sisters. He had listened with the most rapt attention to their singing; had helped them to work in their garden—to play with the children from the Ferns—and was always on the watch to render Alice those little cares which her blindness might warrant, though few people stood in less need of them than herself. And it happened that

in his conversation, which was unaffected, almost to bluntness, he never uttered a disgraceful sentiment—so that instead of offending his hearers by the overflowing coarseness and selfishness which teems in every word that most young men utter, he gave people the impression, quite unconsciously on his part, of being an honest man.

Therefore the sisters became acquainted with him so rapidly that they could hardly believe they had known him but a few days — and therefore Alice now sat with a shade of deep vexation overspreading her countenance, while she went on mechanically with her knitting. Maud was perfectly unable to enter into her sister's feelings upon this occasion; not being of a character at all liable to sudden attachments, she had not begun to entertain any regard for Captain Scudamore beyond that of a common and recent acquaintance: he might pay as much attention to Miss Reynolds as he liked without causing her any emotion beyond

that of extreme amusement in watching his proceedings—and beautiful as she was, she was too unused to homage to feel piqued that her pretensions were overlooked for another woman.

But Alice took the matter keenly to heart. With the simplicity of a very young mind, she had believed all the nonsense which Mr. Scudamore's good-nature and high spirits led him to talk to Maud about his son. She valued her sister's beauty and talents with a jealous sensibility — she thought that the moment Captain Scudamore saw Maud, he would think of her as his father wished he might. She was prepossessed herself by what she knew of him, and she looked on him as something that belonged to Maud; but something also, that Miss Reynolds with her usual unprincipled vanity was very likely to pervert to her own purposes. This was an injury to her sister that she felt deeply, and she was not a little mortified that Maud seemed so indifferent to her wrongs.

"I don't think it is very kind of you, dear, to laugh so much at Captain Scudamore," said Alice, gently, after a long pause on both sides.

"Stop, dear! I'm going to put on some coals," cried Maud, evidently on the brink of going off again at this admonition. "Now then!" she continued when she had made up the fire to her satisfaction; "I assure you if I had any thing else to amuse me at this present time, I would altogether overlook 'Dick;' but—"

"And I don't think you ought to call him 'Dick,' exactly," pursued Alice.

"Not *exactly?* Would *Diccon* be a pleasant amendment? There is a legend I once read, of a certain 'Diccon bend the Bow.' And pray why shouldn't I laugh?"

"Because you know how vexed Mr. Scudamore would be if—if his son really paid attention to Miss Reynolds."

"Why, my dear Alice, you never could suppose that I believed all the nonsense our

good grandfather used to talk, as if he could make me a present of Master Dick! like a child saving up a toy to give to its playfellow!"

Alice was silent.

"And of all the nonsense that people talk in this foolish world," pursued Maud, warming with her subject, "the folly they utter on the subject of love is the most deplorable! Falling in love! I don't believe there is such a thing! No, Alice, I don't really. Two idle people drop into each others society, and being utterly without occupation, they first mope a little, and then marry; and they try to persuade their acquaintances they were in love! It is a disease, at any rate; and I don't believe that a sober woman who loves her relations, and employs her mind, will ever love any one else! The thing can't happen! And I'm really gratified by Mr. Scudamore's opinion of my taste, if he thinks I could be induced to quit *my father* for the sake of Master Dick!"

"Hush!" said Alice, turning her head towards the door; "I hear his step!"

"Ah! I know an old proverb," said Maud, snapping her thread from the energy with which she worked and talked together. "But you are right, Alice. He has made a short visit at the Ferns."

Captain Scudamore now came in, with the very scroll which Maud had tried to pass off for a bouquet. He shook hands with the sisters, drew his chair next to Alice, and gave Maud the paper, saying that his father had desired him to bring it to her.

"Many thanks—now don't forget to tell Mr. Scudamore how much I am obliged to him. You have not the best memory in the world! Alice, this is a movement from Spohr's Faust—you will like it so much—I'll play it to you."

Maud always railed at Captain Scudamore; and he liked it: inasmuch as every man had rather be abused than overlooked.

"But I thought I should have found my father here," said Captain Scudamore, "he asked me to call on Colonel Creswick about a horse we were talking of yesterday, and said that I should be sure to find him with you on my return."

"If you were a little older, Captain Scudamore," said Maud, looking gravely at him over the top of the music-desk, "you would know how to limit your expectations to probabilities. Mr. Scudamore retains none of the habits of a military life. He neither drinks, nor swears, nor is punctual.'

"Perhaps in consideration of the two first omissions, you will forgive him the last;" said Captain Scudamore.

"And really—when it is not quite true;" interposed Alice, with her usual gentleness, "for Mr. Scudamore's exactness is quite wonderful, when he pleases—he has often astonished us all."

"Bah! you spoil the antithesis!" exclaimed

Maud. Then throwing a restless glance round the room as if in search of something provoking to say, she suddenly fixed her brilliant eyes on Captain Scudamore.

"How very lame you do walk to-day, to be sure!" she said in a pitying tone.

"Well, I thought I walked so much better than I did," said Captain Scudamore, rather mortified; for he believed implicitly what she said.

"What you *did* it is impossible to guess, you hopped, I dare say; but if you would like to see how you managed in the Creswick's drawing-room yesterday evening, I will ring for Karl, and he shall come and turn over my music leaves. I suppose you turned over the leaves for Miss Reynolds—no! don't deny it; I trust you did not so far forget yourself as to omit so essential a duty. Oh! I don't want you to turn over *my* leaves. You may sit down again! I merely wish to hint that you walk at present just like Karl.

"How do you manage your sister?" said Captain Scudamore, turning with a smile to Alice.

"Oh! don't mind what she says, Captain Scudamore," said Alice; "she does not mean it; I assure you that I hardly recognised your step this morning."

"Hardly! I like that!" exclaimed Maud, "when—" she paused, on seeing her sister's beseeching face turned towards her; "when," she added, "*I* heard you a mile off!"

"Then it is clear you were looking out for me," retorted Captain Scudamore.

"Oh! I was," said Maud; "I wanted you to help plant the rose trees."

"By all means. I can manage to dig, I suppose."

"I don't know that, but Karl will shew you how; and meantime, what do you think of this fragment? Quite organ music, is it not Alice?"

"Quite," said Alice.

"I can't see any tune in it," said Captain Scudamore.

"Now there's a bad revengeful disposition!" exclaimed Maud, "he is angry with me, and he vents his temper upon poor Spohr."

Maud left the piano as she spoke, and wandered about the room, uncertain how she should employ herself next.

"Shall I read to you," asked Captain Scudamore, observing books lying open on the table.

"Oh dear no! don't read," exclaimed Maud, settling herself in her chair; "I always make up my mind to hear a little gossip when you come; let us have the history of your party yesterday."

"Well but what do you wish to hear about? the dishes there were at table?"

"Of course not!" exclaimed Maud. "Was it a large party."

"Yes—pretty well—about twenty people."

"And who did you take into the dining room."

"A young lady whose name I understood was Stapylton."

"Not Miss Reynolds?"

"Certainly not."

"Had you a pleasant evening?"

"Very much so—I had known Mrs. Reynolds before and therefore it was agreeable to meet her again—though I really felt awkward in beginning the conversation, since all our mutual recollections go back to the lifetime of poor Lyle.

"Did she seem to feel it?"

"Not at all—she frequently referred to the period when we were all so much together, without the least embarrassment."

"*Can* she have any feeling?" exclaimed Maud, indignantly.

"I don't know—but she is a very attractive woman—there is something so engaging in her manner. She was full of your praises."

"Ah! there she shewed her taste—and did you hear Miss Reynolds sing?"

"No! I believe not—no, I don't think anybody sang except Mrs. Reynolds.

"What was Miss Reynolds doing then all the evening?"

"She was playing écarté with young Stapylton at the only time that I happened to notice her."

"Do you think her handsome?" asked Alice timidly.

"Yes; I imagine she is goodlooking," said Captain Scudamore; "but to tell you the truth, I hardly noticed her—she was not conspicuous. Mrs. Reynolds is so completely the first person in every company."

"Poor Miss Reynolds!" exclaimed Maud.

"I don't see the grievance," said Captain Scudamore; "she appears either sulky or proud—and as she does not try to please people, she need not be surprised at the success of those who do."

"Now tell me how Miss Reynolds was drest?" said Maud.

At this question, Captain Scudamore laughed so heartily that Maud started up protesting that she should go to find Karl and plant the rose-tress without his assistance; and in pursuance of her threat she fetched Alice's bonnet and cloak and dressed her very quickly, rejecting all the help that he offered from time to time. He addressed himself to Alice with more success, and obtained permission to put away her work while she was preparing for her walk. She even allowed him to lead her into the garden, in spite of Maud's impatient exclamation.

"You need not make a fuss about nothing!" she cried, as he drew her sister's hand through his arm. "Alice knows her way a great deal better than you do!"

When Mr. Scudamore came to meet his son, he found Maud and Karl busy planting, and Captain Scudamore walking up and down the gravel walks with Alice.

Maud was very ready with an explanation.

"Alice was chilly standing, and as for Captain Scudamore he was only a trouble, and so she had sent him out of her way."

Mr. Scudamore was quite satisfied; but the little Lyles were not; for they had been at the end of the Laurel-walk, shouting and making signs every time Captain Scudamore and Alice came near them, and all in vain. Alice did not see them, and her companion did not hear them; and it was reserved for Maud when she went down the garden, arm-in-arm with Mr. Scudamore, to catch sight of the little ones stamping with impatience and clinging to the green gates, and begging Harley to join her voice to theirs.

Pouring out a whole volley of reproaches upon Captain Scudamore for his unaccountable deafness, Maud darted across the road in an instant, and returned with one child in her arms and the other clinging to her dress, and in another minute Edward was careering in Karl's barrow, and Maud chasing Lucy across

the lawn, while Alice and Captain Scudamore stood quietly by, and enjoyed the tumult in their own way.

CHAPTER VIII.

Or when to the lute
She sung and made the night bird mute,
That still records with moon,
Marina gets
All praises which are paid as debts,
And not as given.

Pericles.

Florence was very soon made aware of one peculiarity that her father possessed. He liked to know where every body was, and what they were doing. As soon as he found out, after breakfast, that Mrs. Reynolds was in the conservatory with Colonel Creswick, and the children learning to spell with Harley, he was

then anxious to learn how Florence was employing her time. If he heard that she was sitting with Mrs. Creswick in her dressing-room, which was now often the case during the morning, he was contented; for he had a high respect for his sister, and concluded that something useful was going on wherever she presided. He had not as yet put in execution his plan of superintending her mental improvement. He was too much occupied in arranging his own affairs, and his frequent visits to London for this purpose, as well as for the purpose of engaging a house for the ensuing season, engrossed both his time and thoughts. But in order that she might not be totally unemployed, her father having learned with some astonishment that she had never read "Hallam's History of the Middle Ages," purchased it for her, and recommended that she should make herself thoroughly acquainted with its contents, suggesting at the same time that the most efficacious method of reading works of

that kind, was with a pencil and paper, to note down such facts as you may not have met with before, or such expressions of opinion as you think may require further consideration, or confirmation by other authors.

Florence stared a little at these admonitions, some of which had been slightly suggested to her by Mrs. Creswick, it need not be said, in vain; accepted the books with as gracious a manner as if they had been a case of jewels, and took care to be seen with a volume in her hand once or twice after breakfast.

One morning Mr. Reynolds made his appearance in Mrs. Creswick's dressing room, where his sister was writing, and Florence lounging in a chair, with "Hallam" open on her lap; and taking a seat beside his daughter, he entered into conversation with her on the subject of her studies.

"This is a book of outlines you perceive;" he said, taking it up; "the most condensed

account I am acquainted with, of a most important section of history.

Florence acquiesced, with her usual prepared smile.

"It is a book that would content no student of history," pursued her father; "but from its accuracy and method, it is admirably adapted to prepare the mind for a wider range of reading. For instance in this chapter, the condition of Italy for many centuries is distinctly sketched. This prepares you to read the works of the great Italian historians with interest. Davila, and Guicciardini."

Florence looked to her aunt as if imploring some assistance against this inundation of literature. But Mrs. Creswick was steadily writing and dotting, without raising her eyes from her paper.

"You are now" said her father, observing the portion of the first volume on which she appeared to be engaged; "you are now doubtless familiar with allodial and feudal tenures,

with the origin of fiefs and with the distinction between proper and improper feuds—and you perceive how very much of legal and social knowledge hangs upon a clear understanding of these important points."

Florence understood exactly as much of these things as she did before she opened the book; for although her eye had carelessly traversed the pages, she had been unceasingly occupied with musings upon her own altered lot, and she retained not one syllable that she had read.

"I cannot boast of much knowledge upon these points," she replied politely, but very coldly; "where there is a total want of interest on any subject, it is not easy to retain the author's remarks, and I confess that I feel no curiosity to explore the feudal system, or the petty quarrels of the Italian Republics."

"It is to be regretted," returned her father, "not so much for the subjects in themselves, as

because they form a large feature in the annals of literature."

Florence was silent.

Mrs. Creswick having folded and sealed her letter, now looked up.

"Mrs. Reynolds begged me to ask Maud and her sister to come in this evening;" she said. "Perhaps you and Florence would step over and give them my message!"

"Certainly," said Mr. Reynolds. "As we leave the Ferns so soon, I am glad Mrs. Reynolds will have the opportunity of passing an evening with those very attractive young people. Florence my dear, get ready."

Florence retired, pale with anger at the idea of being commanded to do anything, or go anywhere. As she closed the door, Mr. Reynolds turned abruptly to his sister.

"She has no energy,—no desire for improvement," he exclaimed. "Her life up to the present time has been a waste!"

"It has;" replied Mrs. Creswick.

"A fortune expended, and nothing to show for it: not even the poor advantage of ornament—for Mrs. Reynolds tells me that she does not sing nearly so well as Miss Warrenne, who has never enjoyed half her opportunities."

"It is true," said Mrs. Creswick.

"Do not think I imply a shadow of reproach to you," said Mr. Reynolds, "I well know that her education was not committed to your hands—you had no power to compel her thoughts."

"None," returned his sister.

"But now, what is to be done?" he asked. "Will she learn?—will she consent to retrieve the negligence of past years?"

"I think not," said Mrs. Creswick, "she does not feel the value of knowledge, and she is too old to be compelled to acquire what is irksome. She is young, and she has a good deal of character—and I have a deep faith in the tuition of circumstances. It is one of the wonderful arrangements of Providence that

every person's life, however smooth the outward current—is fraught with struggles which are meant to educate the soul. I speak of those persons who can think and feel, and who are not debased to the level of the brutes. Florence, I think, will never become a literary character; but if she become docile, affectionate and active, you will have but little to regret."

She did not look particularly docile when she returned to the room drest to accompany her father. Mr. Reynolds, however, was not a person to trouble himself about the manner, provided the obedience was entire. He offered his daughter his arm, and they proceeded in silence to the Warrennes.

As they crossed the road they met Harley returning without the children. Maud had begged and obtained leave of Mrs. Reynolds to fetch over the little ones whenever she caught sight of them in the Laurel-walk; and there were few pleasures they looked forward

to so eagerly as an hour's play with Maud and her sister.

They found Alice playing on the seraphine, with little Edward standing beside her, his eyes rivetted on her face. Captain Scudamore was seated near the instrument, and gazing on her with equal earnestness. A large cluster of violets that lay in the desk of the seraphine seemed to the experienced eye of Florence to say a great deal.

Lucy nestled in the corner of the sofa, with her head resting on Maud's shoulder, was waving her hand slowy in time to the music.

There was a general move on the entrance of the visiters. Maud came forward to receive them. Alice rose, and for the first time in her life, felt embarrassed; she feared they would notice that Captain Scudamore was ready to lead her to a seat—that they would make a mistake, and fancy he was really paying her attention.

The children ran up to Mr. Reynolds, and

Florence sank upon the sofa, haughty and silent.

"You are so kind to these little ones," said Mr. Reynolds, "that they are never happy away from you."

"They are so good!" said Maud. "We shall hardly know how to supply their place when they go to town."

"We shall be absent merely for one season," said Mr. Reynolds; "a country life, both in its duties and pleasures, suits me best. And when we settle, as I intend to do, in this neighbourhood, I hope Mrs. Reynolds may often enjoy the pleasure of your society."

Maud expressed her satisfaction in this prospect; and then turning to Florence, she attempted to exchange a few remarks with her, but with very little success, so chilling and gloomy was her manner.

"Papa!" said Edward, pointing up to Alice, who was talking in an undertone with Captain Scudamore; "she's blind!"

"Yes, my dear," said Mr. Reynolds.

"But she has two eyes! Why can't she see?" asked the child.

"I do not know, my dear; but you must not ask—it is neither kind nor polite."

"Papa!" he exclaimed, with that total forgetfulness of reproof that young children often exhibit; "we are to have a ride in Karl's barrow, presently."

"And Karl cannot speak English," said Lucy.

"I had rather have a ride on Dick's beautiful horse," said Edward. "I rode all round the court-yard yesterday; only Dick held me on. I should like to ride by myself."

Mr. Reynolds, not knowing who Dick was, this remark passed without reproof.

"What, are you going?" asked Maud as Captain Scudamore crossed the room to take leave of her. "I thought you would have helped to wheel the children in the barrow?"

"No, no! I overturned them into the

hedge last time; I will have nothing to do with the barrow again," he replied.

"Oh! if you have so little enterprise as to be deterred by a single failure, I give you up. Tell Mr. Scudamore that we live in hopes of seeing him at dinner."

Florence, who felt deeply wronged that Captain Scudamore had not yet sought an opportunity of recommending himself to her notice, bowed, with the utmost coldness, as he left the room. She glanced bitterly from Maud to Alice, and from Alice to the nosegay of violets, wondering which of the sisters had robbed her of her meed of homage.

"I hope that Florence has been able to persuade you to pass the evening with us?" said Mr. Reynolds, addressing Maud.

"I have not yet had time to urge my aunt's request," said Florence, coldly. "Mrs. Creswick hopes you may be disengaged to-night. We drink tea at eight."

Maud accepted at once. Alice, in a timid

voice, reminded her that they were expecting Mr. Scudamore and his son to dinner.

"All the better," said Maud; "they will keep papa company, and he will not miss us, you know."

"We have nothing to offer at the Ferns, I am sure, that could compensate for the loss of Captain Scudamore's society!" said Florence, bitterly.

"Captain Scudamore would be the loser by our arrangement," remarked Mr. Reynolds. Suppose, Miss Warrenne, you could prevail on him to escort you to the Ferns? Mr. Warrenne and Mr. Scudamore would then be left to enjoy each others company."

Maud, with a laughing ease of manner which showed that the matter was perfectly indifferent to her, readily undertook to answer for Captain Scudamore; and Mr. Reynolds and his daughter took their leave.

Captain Scudamore appeared perfectly resigned to his fate, when Maud told him, as

they were standing round the fire before dinner, that he was to go with them to the Ferns in the evening. Mr. Warrenne, indeed, hinted to his daughter that she ought to have accepted for him conditionally; but Mr. Scudamore said that would have been perfectly unnecessary, for wherever Maud was, there, of course, Dick would prefer to be.

This gallant speech made Mr. Warrenne look rather grave. Maud merely laughed; and Captain Scudamore, who was leaning on the back of Alice's chair, said to her,—

"I am very happy to go, I am sure. You will play there, just as if you were at home, will you not? I should regret to lose your playing this evening."

"If I am asked," said Alice, in a low voice.

"You are sure not to be asked if Miss Reynolds can avoid it," said Maud; "she likes to have all the playing in her own hands."

Mr. Scudamore laughed at Maud for this speech, and said she was jealous of Miss Rey-

nolds, though, he observed to his son, there were very few people of whom Maud need be jealous.

Captain Scudamore assented to this polite speech of his father's with such an absent air as would have convinced a more clear-sighted person that his thoughts were very differently occupied; in fact, all the overtures that had hitherto been made to Maud, had been solely the work of Mr. Scudamore.

They found, on arriving at the Ferns, that, as usual, the Creswicks were not alone. Mr. and Mrs. Thomason and their daughter, who were going to see a relation at some distance from Erlesmede, took it in their way, in order that Ada might pay a flying visit to her god-mother. Mrs. Creswick led Maud up to Ada, and introduced the young people particularly to each other. Miss Thomason appeared much pleased at being made known to the sisters, and left her seat by the Colonel to join their party.

Mrs. Reynolds fell into conversation with Captain Scudamore, who, however, remained close to Alice; while Mr. Thomason and Mr. Reynolds, standing together on the hearth-rug, were discussing the political question of the hour.

Mrs. Thomason was accommodated with a large arm chair, and her eternal knitting, over which she heaved her usual proportion of sighs.

"Now, my dear Ada, you must give me tidings of your cousin, Mr. Courtenay," said Mrs. Creswick.

"Charles?" said Ada, turning round; "he remained in town—it is a little papa's fault that he did not come with us—he only needed half a word of pressing, I am sure—for on my word his souvenirs of Erlesmede are very animated!"

She turned towards Maud with a smile as she spoke, without guessing how very near she was to the mark.

"I told Charles there was a seat for him," said Mrs. Thomason, with a sigh. "I thought he would like the change; but he fancied he could not be spared from the business."

"He is the most considerate person I know!" said Ada, warmly. "I do not know how I shall learn to go without his cares—in little things I mean—which I must forego when he marries; his wife would not thank me for engrossing him as I do now."

"Is he—" Maud was going to make some enquires, which a strange feeling of restraint seemed to check.

"Oh! you have no idea; he rides with me, drives mamma and me out, chooses my books, and very particular he is, I can assure you!—and gives me so much advice, that I fairly tell him I don't know what to do with it all! As a husband, he might be too exacting, but since I never mind what he says, I find him delightful as a cousin. How did you get on with him?" she added, turning to Florence.

"Do not fear that I shall interrupt his friendly attentions to you," said Florence; "to be candid with you, I find him a very unbending, impenetrable person."

"Ah! but then my dear, the delight of forcing him to bend, of sending him on provoking little errands, of doing what you know he disapproves for the mere pleasure of hearing his grave remonstrances, and laughing at them—in fact of teazing him from morning till night! don't you agree with me?" said Ada turning to Maud; "to enjoy all this in perfection, it is necessary that he should be a grave unbending person."

Maud, her sparkling eyes brimming with laughter, assented to Miss Thomason's remarks. She felt for the first time that there would be something very piquant in such a triumph.

"Come Ada, don't make yourself out worse than you are," sighed Mrs. Thomason; "Miss Warrenne will think you are in earnest, you do

plague your cousin, and I often wonder at his patience, but you are not so bad as that!"

"You have a charming house in town Mrs. Reynolds," said Mr. Thomason; "I knew it when my friend Sir Ralph Masters had it."

"I have not seen it, but I am sure it is perfect," said Mrs Reynolds; "I mean to be delighted with it beforehand—Mr. Reynolds has so much taste!"

Mr. Reynolds paused in a question he was addressing to Colonel Creswick, bowed gravely to the compliment, and then resumed his conversation.

"Don't you long to be in town again, dear Florence?" asked Ada in a whisper.

Florence shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh! I didn't tell you before dinner,—Lord Thomas Mortimer proposed for Miss Lockwood about a week ago—Lady Jane, who is her guardian, you know, absolutely refused him! Poor Miss Lockwood is breaking her heart about it. Do you think him handsome."

"Very," replied Florence; "and so fascinating in his manners."

"He is dreadfully in debt," said Ada.

"If Lady Jane was not a great screw," said Florence, "she would come forward handsomely, and put things to rights for them—it would be such a nice match for Caroline!"

"She has taken her down to Leamington instead;" said Ada, laughing, "that will cost her something."

"Leamington is dull now, is it not?" asked Florence.

"*A ne pas en finir!*" replied Ada, "but I suppose Dr. J—— is to drive Lord Thomas out of her head. Oh! and Captain Le Grange's duel—have you heard of that?"

"No—with whom? I really hear nothing," returned Florence.

"With the Count de Merville—some quarrel at the gaming table."

"I hope he was hurt!" exclaimed Florence, eagerly.

"How cruel you are!" returned Ada. "He *was* hurt indeed. The count's ball shattered one side of his face horribly; they didn't know when we left town yesterday whether he would recover or not—and that was four days after the duel took place."

"I always detested that man!" said Florence.

"Always?" replied Miss Thomason, archly.

"Yes—I never saw so repulsive a person."

"Oh! and I know a little bit of scandal about Mr. Roxby, but I'll leave you to penetrate that when you come to town."

"No—do tell me," said Florence.

Ada leaned over and whispered to her.

"No!" exclaimed Florence, "that *must* be scandal!"

"I told you it was," replied Ada.

"A woman of her age!" exclaimed Florence.

"Sixty-four," replied Ada.

"Have you come to the end of your London

budget?" asked Mr. Thomason, looking with a smile at his daughter.

"At last, papa;" replied Ada.

"What was that about Roxby?" asked Mr. Thomason.

"Oh papa, you know."

"Not I, indeed;" replied Mr. Thomason.

"That he is paying his addresses to Mrs. Liversege," said Ada.

"Impossible—don't believe her, Miss Warrenne—these Londoners when they come down into the country, are very much given to hoaxing their friends."

"I ought to apologise to Miss Warrenne," said Ada, "for talking so much about people that cannot amuse her—but that is a London fault, my dear Miss Warrenne—we get to talk of people, not things. At least Charles tells me so."

"I wish you would recollect all your cousin tells you, my dear," said Mrs. Thomason.

"What a perfect creature I should be!"

replied Ada. "Now Miss Warrenne by way of returning good for evil, give me the gratification of hearing you and your sister sing."

Maud rose and turned to look for Alice. She was seated at a table with a book of engravings open before her. Captain Scudamore standing beside her, was describing the views to her in succession. They were of Indian scenery.

"Never interrupt a flirtation," said Ada, holding Maud back; "you don't know the mischief you may do!"

"It's only Alice;" said Maud, simply, "she's not flirting."

"And besides, Miss Warrenne may have reasons for breaking off the interview!" said Florence.

Maud looked at Miss Reynolds with some astonishment.

Ada smiled archly.

"Alice dear, come and sing," said Maud.

Captain Scudamore hastened to clear the

way for Alice, and to lead her to the piano. Mrs. Reynolds chose their song. Ada stood leaning on the instrument. Mr. Reynolds remarked gravely to Mr. Thomason,—"that if he was fond of music, he would be highly gratified by the Miss Warrenne's performance."

"And you have never been to the Opera!" exclaimed Mrs. Reynolds, "what a treat is in store for you! With your talents, how you would enjoy Grisi! How you would dwell on every note of Moriani!"

"I wish you came to town," said Ada. "Mamma joins a friend in subscribing for a box—and we should be so pleased to take you!"

"The Miss Warrennes deserve to go to town;" said Mr. Reynolds, "many persons seek only to gratify a taste for luxury and dissipation, by visiting the capital—but we must not forget that it offers to the few, the highest intellectual gratifications."

"My dear," whispered Ada, "am I right in

suspecting that *cher papa* is just a little severe in his notions?"

"Fancy!—intellectual gratifications!" retorted Florence.

"How delightfully Charles would get on with him," said Ada.

"I shouldn't wonder," returned Florence, "for *entre nous*, my dear, I should imagine your cousin a formidable person to live with!"

"Don't you turn his head, then?" said Ada, laughing, "since you would not have him if he proposed."

"I'll do my best to break his heart, I promise you," replied Florence, in the same tone.

Ada shook her head, and went back to Maud.

"Do you mean to let your little sister marry before you?" she asked.

Maud, who had not been enough in society to learn that half the conversation consists in threadbare jests upon marrying and giving in marriage, opened wide her large eyes, and

turned them from Alice to Miss Thomason in unfeigned perplexity.

"Well, you will remember me when it comes to pass," continued Ada; "and now tell me something about your delightful brother. Does he like Paris?"

"He was not long there; but he was enraptured with Venice! I had four or five letters from him while he was in that city."

"Ah! Venice would suit him exactly—so romantic, so melancholy—wasn't he, Florence? Born to 'swim in a gondola,' as Portica has it. Did you ever act plays?"

"Never," said Maud.

"I was thinking you and your sister would make such a perfect Roselind and Celia—it would be an illusion—I was going once to act in a tableau, but actually Charles would not let me. It was certainly a very public affair, but I did not thank him for his interferance."

"Very ridiculous," said Florence; "one is

always *en scène* in society, whether we act tableaux or not."

"That's a very true remark, which I shall carry back to Charles," said Ada. "It strikes me, my dear Miss Warrenne, that you are acting a very unkind part by your sister to break up such a very comfortable *tête-à-tête* as she seems to be enjoying with her handsome cavalier. What a pity that all his looks are wasted on her, dear little creature; but I hope you impress upon her that he is very good-looking!"

Maud, seeing that Ada was laughing, laughed too, without any definite idea of what she meant, touched Alice to recal her thoughts to the rest of the company, and reminding her that it was growing late, wished her hostess good night.

CHAPTER IX.

Kite.—And well I wish you'd take some wholesome counsel and curb your headstrong humours.

Ben Jonson.

The day at last arrived on which the Reynolds family were to leave Erlesmede for London—a period which had once been anticipated by Florence with as much pride as delight. Now, she would have given much to have been permitted to remain at the Ferns, where at least she was an object both to the Colonel and her aunt, whereas in her new home she knew that her father's mind was fully occupied with his fresh ties, and for her step-mother, it was not in nature that she should feel any other solici-

tude for her welfare than a very earnest desire to get her married well and soon.

Certainly it does appear rather a selfish thing when a young woman marries a widower with a daughter old enough to take the head of his house, and educated to expect such a charge. The usurper cannot conceal from herself the fact, that she is a very unwelcome addition to part of the family—that she is accessary to what might be almost called an act of injustice, and that there is a little want of delicacy in thus wresting the sceptre from the lawful heir. But, perhaps, on these occasions she may console herself by the idea that if she does not marry the victim, somebody else will; and, therefore, as she cannot shield his daughter from the injury, there is no reason why she should not reap the benefit.

Mrs. Reynolds was essentially selfish—a very nice woman — but selfish. She loved herself best--next, her children, and thirdly, Mr. Reynolds—for she was not one of those

guilty widows who marry a man they don't like at all! On the contrary, she liked Mr. Reynolds very much, and he liked her still better, and treated her with great kindness—a commodity of which he had but little, and so kept it all for her. It was amazing how kind she was—how considerate. She had every thing she wanted—a luxurious home, bright prospects for her children—jewels, clothes, money, to her heart's content—and out of her superfluities she was so willing to give—so generous—she subscribed to charities, and consulted Mrs. Creswick about forming plans for the relief of the poor.

And she was so polite, even friendly to Florence! She would have been quite intimate with her step-daughter, if she would have met her advances; but to her crushed and embittered spirit Mrs. Reynolds' kindly intercourse seemed nothing but the blandishment of a traitor.

As for Mr. Reynolds, when he found how

greatly his daughter needed improvement, and how steadily she resisted it, he made no farther attempt towards winning her confidence; and Florence felt that she was admitted into the household of two strangers, who completely occupied with each other, had not a thought to waste upon her.

The carriage was at the door, but the horses were not yet put to; packing was going forward; Mr. Reynolds was standing at a window with little Edward in his arms, who seemed to enjoy overlooking the bustle. Lucy, kneeling on a chair beside him, amused herself by trying to recognise the different packages as they were being carried from the house to the carriage.

"That's papa's dressing case," she exclaimed; "I know it by the purple cover:" and that's mamma's bonnet box—there are three bonnets inside; that's papa's writing-desk. Look, Edward, it won't go under the seat— there are so many things already."

"Where will they put our playthings, papa?" asked Edward.

"Nottridge will take care of them. He has put them in a safe place, I dare say," returned Mr. Reynolds.

"Where, papa?" repeated the child.

"I do not know, but you may trust to Nottridge; he never forgets you."

"Are they in the boot?" said the child.

"They are gone on with my trunks, by the carrier," said Mrs. Reynolds, turning round. "Come to me, Edward, and don't be troublesome to papa."

In reply to this invitation, the child gave a sharp little cry, and hid his face on Mr. Reynolds shoulder, while he grasped the collar of his coat tightly with both hands.

"He is not troublesome," said Mr. Reynolds gravely.

A smile passed between Mrs. Reynolds and Mrs. Creswick.

"Perhaps, aunt," said Florence, who, taking

no interest in the preparations, had remained silently leaning back in her chair, with her dog in her lap; "perhaps, you would have the kindness to take care of Fidelio for me during our stay in town. I shall reclaim him if we return to this part of the country."

"Gladly, my dear," replied Mrs. Creswick; "and I hope to restore him to you in excellent health at the end of a few months."

"But why not take him with you, my dear Florence?" exclaimed Mrs. Reynolds; "such an amusement—such a treasure of a dog!"

"Is not the little white dog to go with us, papa?" cried Edward.

"Oh, papa!" echoed Lucy.

For in spite of the predictions of Florence, the children seldom went out of doors without enticing Fidelio to accompany them; and Florence had often (on enquiring for her dog as she retnrned from a ride or a drive,) had the pleasure of learning, that it was serving as a plaything to the little Lyles.

"Are you tired of your lap-dog?" asked Mr. Reynolds.

"Not at all," replied Florence; "but it struck me that the restraint of a London life would hardly suit him; and knowing my aunt to be fond of dogs, I had the less hesitation in consigning him to her care."

"It is such a pity though, to be parted from your favourite," said Mrs. Reynolds, compassionating the wistful glances of her children. "You know there are always the parks."

"I do not think dogs are allowed in the parks," replied Florence, coldly.

"No, but in the carriage with us," pleaded Mrs. Reynolds.

"Thank you," replied Florence; "I leave him in excellent hands."

"Papa must buy Edward a little white dog, if he is good," said Mrs. Reynolds.

Florence ground her teeth; and turned from the child's expressions of delight, with a pang at her heart, that blanched her face.

Mrs. Creswick regarded her with uneasiness. Mrs. Reynolds moved off to put on her travelling dress, and Mrs. Creswick, drawing nearer to her niece, said to her in a low tone—

"My dear, our own happiness is the sport of every breath; but there are very few individuals who have not the power to contribute to the happiness of other people. This reflection should be a source of lasting comfort."

"*A-propos* to what, aunt?" returned Florence; "do you infer that I ought to offer Fidelio to those children, to propitiate them or their parents?"

"My remark had a wider aim," replied Mrs. Creswick; "If you wish me to speak more clearly—"

"By all means," said Florence.

"You feel then, that your prospects are clouded," said Mrs. Creswick; "your happiness is impaired, but even in the circle to which you at present belong, your conduct can either impair or increase the comfort of your

relations. For all our powers we are answerable—and if we annoy where we might console, and chill where we might conciliate, we are neglecting means of usefulness for which we shall hereafter have to account. And trials, my dear Florence, are meant to soften, not to embitter."

"*Trials*—not *injuries!*" replied Florence, rising.

"Injuries from men, are trials from God," replied Mrs. Creswick.

Florence paused, looked earnestly at her aunt, and then hastily left the room.

At last the travellers were ready — the adieux were spoken—the carriage swept away at a good pace. It was one of those foreign conveyances holding four people, and having at least two-thirds inconveniently filled up with windows. Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds sat on one seat; Florence and the two children on the seat opposite. The children, like all other children, could not be supposed to make a

journey of five hours without fidgetting; for the first twenty miles, they asked about every ten minutes if they were not near London—they then wanted to eat, and crumbled biscuit and gingerbread over the dark blue folds of Florence's velvet pellisse—they then took a fancy to change places with each other perpetually; this led to noise and laughter, and a great deal of scuffling, during which they continually pushed each other against Florence, knocked her muff off her lap, and endangered the safety of her watch, and finally, insisted on taking turns to look out of the window, which they achieved by sitting on "papa's" knee, and kicking Florence with their little feet whenever anything occurred to delight them particularly. Add to this, that being a raw, drizzling day, Mrs. Reynolds, who was very chilly, kept all the windows shut; while Florence, like most English-bred girls, was indifferent to the weather, and absolutely gasped for fresh air. She took refuge in the coldest tran-

quillity, and reclining with half-shut eyes in her corner of the carriage, never stirred nor spoke a word during the tumult that surrounded her.

At last, as the light faded, they entered London. The carriage drew up before the portals of a splendid house. Mr. Reynolds handed out his wife, and welcomed her gravely, but earnestly, to her first English home. The children and Florence got out together, she hardly knew how, and followed their parents into the hall. The air was laden with perfume, lamps gleaned from perfect thickets of greenhouse plants, which, raised upon stages, reached up to the roof. The massive staircase was illuminated by statues, with antique lamps suspended from their hands. The drawing-room was a model of costly luxury.

Mrs. Reynolds was in a pretty little extacy at every step; everything was exactly as she could wish; the flowers were delicious; the entrance imposing; the mirrors and furniture

splendid. Mr. Reynolds's taste was complimented, and his kindness warmly thanked, when she found in the second drawing-room a seraphine handsomer than Alice Warrenne's. Giving Mr. Reynolds her bonnet to hold, which always seemed to encumber her graceful head, she flirted round the room, dived into all the easy chairs, tried the couches, opened the inlaid cabinets, and finally sat down before the blazing fire to warm her fingers. Harley had swept the children into the nursery as they were going upstairs; but Florence had entered the drawing-room and sunk on the first chair near the entrance, weary and sick at heart. She was near a window, and she turned her head and looked out into the street to avoid the raptures of Mrs. Reynolds.

The streets were dirty, and a drizzling rain fell;—without, all was gloomy; and within, Mrs. Reynolds was seated on the hearth. Perfectly unable to support the misery of such a return to the home where she had once expected

to rule, she rose, and said to her step-mother, in a feeble voice—

"Perhaps, Mrs. Reynolds, you will allow me to ring for my maid, and to retire for the night. I feel a cold coming on, and I find that in such a case, one's own room is the only place."

Mrs. Reynolds started up at once—all active kindness. She would have rung the bell herself, but that her husband saved her the trouble. She called for a taper, sent word that Louise was to await them in Miss Reynolds's room, and insisted on going up with her to see that she was comfortable.

"I thought you looked pale during the journey," said she; "but I hoped it was only a headache brought on by the motion of the carriage. But a cold is serious and provoking, for we are engaged out every day this week. Dinners!—stupid affairs, I dare say; only I want you to look very, very"—(she paused, and looked archly at Florence)—"Made-

moiselle, you should warm that dressing-gown; warm everything when one is going to have a cold. What a country, what a climate! Do you ever take arrowroot? I will send you some white soup and some chicken; and then go to bed at once, my dear Florence, and drink no end of hot coffee. I shall step in and see you before I go to bed, but I will be careful not to wake you if you are asleep."

All this was so kind that Florence tried to receive it cordially—not to be ungracious in her tones. She began to feel the importance of having a friend; and to find that her beauty alone would not secure her consideration at home. She found, too, that the furniture of her dressing-room might content a more fastidious person than herself; and however dreary she might feel her life below-stairs, here was a retreat where she might possibly, with her novels and her piano, enjoy herself very much. Here she might think over the past, and lay plans for future triumphs. She began

pretty comfortably—with her couch drawn close to the fire, and plenty of fragrant coffee on the little ebony table before her, she lay wrapped in her wadded silk dressing-gown, with a new French novel in her hand, and enjoyed her first evening in town more than she could have expected.

CHAPTER X.

Din. You, to whom Nature
Gave with a liberal hand most excellent form—
Your education, language, and discourse,
And judgment to distinguish—when you shall
With feeling sorrow understand how wretched
And miserable you have made yourself;
And, but yourself, have nothing to accuse—
Can you, with hope, from any beg compassion?

Little French Lawyer.

Perhaps the white soup worked wonders—perhaps a long night's rest restored Florence to something like her usual spirits; for she came down to breakfast the next morning in high beauty, and with something like a determination to look upon the bright side of her lot.

The first words that her father addressed to her, were not of a very cheering nature.

"I am glad to see you down stairs," he said; "unless you are under medical care it is a weak habit of indulgence to keep your room and assume the habits of an invalid."

This speech, which seemed to cut off from her the power of retreating at will into her luxurious little dressing-room, did not contribute to keep up her spirits.

Nothing could surpass the perfect independence of her life at Erlesmede: with the exception of a grave speech, now and then, from her aunt, her time was absolutely at her own disposal. Colonel Creswick had always considered it a proper tribute to her youth and beauty, to be invariably ready to ride or walk with her, and to forward any plans that she set on foot. If she wished for a pic-nic, it was to be made—if she desired to go to a ball, a party was formed—if she wanted a bouquet, the green-houses were pillaged. If she chose to

have a cold, she took to her room, her aunt pitied her and sat with her, and the Colonel sent up messages and hot-house grapes at discretion. She never entered the room without his placing her a chair—never left it without his flying to open the door.

It was true he paid the same courtesies invariably to her aunt, and she had not valued them at the time because he was an ugly little man, and never wore two wigs in succession of the same colour, which causes were quite sufficient to ensure him the contempt of Florence; but she found it quite a different thing to go without these attentions.

At the breakfast table, instead of her aunt's kind enquiries concerning her plans for the day, and the Colonel's bantering reproaches upon her cruelty, or her conquests of the preceding evening, a solemn silence was observed. Mr. Reynolds read the papers with the closest attention, and Mrs. Reynolds seemed to find the most exquisite enjoyment, in observing her

husband's abstraction; for, with the most animated smiles, she pointed the observation of Florence to this interesting spectacle, and corresponded with her by signs concerning the courtesies of the table.

After breakfast Mr. Reynolds went to his club, and his wife to her children, and Florence fled to her room, and looked over her clothes and trinkets.

The next duty to be fulfilled was a long course of shopping with her step-mother. Florence liked this occupation very well: they went to mercers and milliners—they bought trinkets and gloves and fans, and supplied themselves with every new and useless decoration. Sometimes it was Florence who remembered some imperative want; sometimes it was Mrs. Reynolds who suddenly became conscious that life would be a burden, if she were not furnished with some idle *bijou* of the day.

Much as Florence regretted that she was

not mistress of the beautiful equipage that conveyed them; vexatious as it was to see Mrs. Reynolds ring for the carriage, and to hear her order the coachman to Harding's, or Howell's and James's, yet her morning was spent too much after her own heart, to be altogether regretted.

On her return, she had not time to take off her bonnet before the house was besieged with visiters. But here all was not unimpaired felicity. The people who came knew Mrs. Reynolds exceedingly well either in person or by name. They were also well acquainted with Mr. Reynolds. But they did not understand what they were to do with Florence. She was merely a young lady.

People from India have more contempt for single women, than any other people that the sun shines upon; and when it is remembered that most of these ladies have rushed over there, with nothing but a box of fine clothes, and their sixteen or seventeen years, to take into the

market, one may imagine of what desperate importance they consider it that every woman should secure to herself a husband Florence *might* marry, but they were not disposed to give her the credit of it beforehand: so after they had been named to her, and asked whether she had been out to India, they let her alone. Florence was by no means behind hand in returning their indifference. She drew her chair even nearer to the fender, took up an Annual, and amused herself by looking over the engravings until the visiters were gone.

At length the tide ebbed, and the last guest bade Mrs. Reynolds farewell. Then Mrs. Reynolds congratulated Florence on their release, rang for her children, and with her guitar in her lap, and her feet on a faldstool, she sat over the fire playing and singing to the little ones, who nestled on the rug at her feet.

Then came the question, "And what shall you wear, my dear Florence, to-night?"

"I hardly know; I am rather chilly.

I think I shall wear my black velvet," said Florence.

"And your hair?"

"Why," said Florence, reflecting, "its very difficult to manage with light hair."

"I wish you would wear blue," said Mrs. Reynolds; "you look so charming in blue."

"I haven't a blue velvet," said Florence; "and I'm so cold to-day—It is wretched weather."

"I'll tell you what would look very pretty in your hair," said Mrs. Reynolds; "green leaves."

"Yes, but that's rather middle-aged," said Florence.

"Is it? then I am sure you do right to avoid it!" exclaimed Mrs. Reynolds; "I don't think there's anything gentlemen have such a horror of in single women as their being of no particular age."

"Pearls don't show in my hair," said Florence; "and jewels are too much for me. I

have some very good amethysts, which I never use; and one does not exactly like to wear flowers at a dinner; though one sees it, I don't think it the best possible taste."

"No; Mr. Reynolds does not like flowers; he prefers jewels," said Mrs. Reynolds: "but I have it! Turquoises; you would look perfectly angelic in turquoises! Only try. Lucy, my darling, go up into mamma's dressing-room, and ask Vining for the sandal-wood casket, and bring it down carefully, like a little pet!"

Lucy brought the perfumed casket to her mamma, who selected from it a beautiful set of turquoises—comb, bracelets, brooch, and earrings. She tried them upon Florence, and was so delighted with their effect, that she insisted with much warmth and cordiality on her accepting them, and wearing them that very evening.

Florence hesitated a little at accepting a

present of so much value; but Mrs. Reynolds was urgent.

"Do take them! You really will oblige me," she said; "they were given me by poor General Gordon. Do you know I shall be glad to get rid of them; for I actually never wore them. I didn't quite like to put them on; for very soon after his death, I married poor Captain Lyle."

"Were you married to General Gordon?" asked Florence, in some surprise.

"No, my dear; he died a few days before my marriage with him. I'll tell you how it happened. I went over to a sister who was married to a Mr. King, a Judge—very well off they were, and of course I hoped that I should do as well for myself as my sister had done. She was very good-looking, I should observe; and fair, which is so prized in India. With my dark eyes I was rather afraid. But, my very first ball, General Gordon fell in love with me, and proposed a week afterwards. Such a

frightful old object as the General I had never seen in my whole life. I almost screamed when Mr. King came in one morning at Tiffin and told me had received a very great offer for me. The General had a capital appointment, so I accepted him directly. He gave me a great many things; there's a fan I'll show you, which was thought to be the finest in the world, and a diamond cross, which was worth eight hundred guineas; and the day before we were to be married, he died. I kept the presents, of course, and everybody pitied me very much. But it pleased a merciful Providence to support me; for I was not the least attached to him, and I soon got over it. An hour before he died, he sent me a ring from his finger, with a very kind message; but I wouldn't touch it, for I was afraid he had died of the cholera. So the Kitmudgar took it back, and I dare say kept it—an emerald worth a hundred pounds;—and after all it was nothing but the gout that he died of. Only if we had but been married first, what a pension

I should have had A fortnight afterwards Lyle proposed, and we were married in three weeks."

"And were you attached to *him?*" asked Florence.

"Oh! yes; and we led the gayest life. He had a Staff appointment at Poonah. We always kept open house. You have no idea of the sort of life in England. He was killed, poor fellow! When I came down to Bombay, I had three offers directly. There was a Captain Meerschaum, in one of the Dragoon Regiments at Bombay. But really his pipe was never out of his mouth, and some people actually said he chewed tobacco; such wretches should really not be allowed to live. And there was a Mr. Macartney, in the Civil Service. Such a handsome man! He drew beautifully, and was always sketching the natives; and I really believe he spoke every dialect in the country; but there was a Hindu woman, and a whole colony of semi-Macartneys,

neither black nor white. At least, that was the report, but people are very scandalous, my dear Florence, in India; and, Mr. Reynolds, he was just coming to England, and that was such a temptation; besides, I was excessively attached to him. I was very glad to leave India. I don't think I shall mind the cold in England the least in the world. If you warm the house from top to bottom, and never stir out but in a carriage, except in summer, I don't see that one need suffer from the temperature."

Florence acquiesced, and for some time sat pondering upon her step-mother's singularities. Such a wonderful mixture of avarice, and generosity, struck her in the first instance. Regretting the pension she lost by the death of her first lover, and giving carelessly away a set of turquoises, that must have been worth seventy or eighty guineas. And then it was strange that Florence, who was as willing as any one to enter into an unprincipled marriage, could not but feel shocked to hear another

person, put her very sentiments into words. Perhaps it was the best practical lesson she could have received, to see her own defects thus exhibited to her, in the character of another. To hear this pretty little engaging woman quietly discuss this traffic of her person, this rapid change of masters, as the proper and inevitable destiny of her sex, would have been rather startling to a person unused to worldly society, and would have led them to believe that the singular freaks of the ancient Babylonian ladies were very praiseworthy and reasonable, and that Christianity, instead of dispelling those odious heathen observances, had merely sanctioned and legalised them.

However, Florence accepted the turquoises of the lamented General with a very good grace, and she began to feel something like cordiality for her father's warm-hearted little wife.

The conference now broke up. Mrs. Reynolds said she should lie down for an hour before dinner, and then when the children took

their tea in her dressing-room, she would take a cup with them; and she was preparing to depart with a child in each hand, when Mr. Reynolds came into the room.

"Is that you, Mr. Reynolds?" she said, "I can hardly see by the fire light; and you stole in so quietly—I'm just going up to see the darlings have their tea. Have you anything to say to me first?"

"Not to you, Mrs. Reynolds," he replied, with a very grim look; "but I desire to speak with Florence."

"I hope nothing is the matter?" said Mrs. Reynolds, eagerly, for she was alarmed by her husband's manner.

"Nothing, thank you;" replied Mr. Reynolds, shaking hands gravely with her, as if he had not seen her for a month; which ceremony was intended by him as a very affectionate demonstration.

"Then when you have said your say," returned Mrs. Reynolds, playfully, "come up

into my room for a cup of tea;—it will do you good before you go out."

"I shall be much obliged to you;" he replied, and then there was a dead silence until the father and daughter were left alone.

The fire burned brightly enough to distinguish their faces. Florence grew pale with apprehension, and her heart beat—she hardly knew why. She, who had been so wilful and haughty to everyone else, felt that in her father she had met with more than her match.

Mr. Reynolds looked darker and darker. At last he began,—

"Listen to me, Florence—I am going to speak seriously to you."

She had no doubt whatever of his seriousness; but she did not like this opening. As soon as he thought she had digested his exordium, he continued,

"A very few minutes conversation with you would convince any educated man of your deplorable want of cultivation. You have spent

many years of your life in the most pitiable idleness. You know, (as far as I have been able to observe the extent of your faculties), absolutely nothing. Beyond a love of gaudy clothes, and a certain assurance in your manners, you have reaped, I do not say no *advantages*, but actually no *impressions*, from the expensive school where you received your education."

Florence, indignant as she was, made no reply. Her father went on.

"Even the example of your excellent aunt has awakened in you no regret at the degraded condition of your intellect, and the sinful frivolity of your life. This, though it was a shock—a disappointment—I soon found that I must bear. But I confess, that till this morning, I imagined that this was to be the extent of my mortification."

Florence grew more alarmed. He certainly could hardly clothe his meaning in stronger words. She dreaded what might come next.

"I now find," said Mr. Reynolds, with an ironical bitterness that quite overwhelmed his daughter, "that I may congratulate myself on the possession of a child whose *vices* are the theme of the clubs, whose allurements and whose treachery are alike subject to the sport and the censure of all the idle men about town."

"And who presumed to tell you this?" asked Florence, rising with all the indignation of outraged virtue, for she really entertained the boarding-school notion that as long as a woman did not break the seventh commandment, no crime could be laid to her charge.

"It little matters who was the teller," said Mr. Reynolds, still more sternly, "it was some one who did not quite attach the same meaning that I do, to such odious conduct; who treated it as a jest, and told me with a laugh that my daughter was an accomplished coquette!"

Florence sank back in her chair. If

coquetry was held to be a crime she did not know what excuse she could urge.

"I consider coquetry," said Mr. Reynolds, "the most despicable species of swindling—an infamous method of attraction, beyond which I know no greater degradation. But your notoriety has attained a climax which I should have hoped would have struck horror even into your callous heart. Dishonestly tampering with the expectations of an unfortunate man you drove the wretch to suicide!"

Florence burst into tears—not from any compassion to the memory of Captain O'Neill, but from feeling literally crushed beneath the unbending severity of her father.

Mr. Reynolds waited in silence until she should have recovered herself.

She soon began to struggle for speech.

"It is well," she said, "that they have not also laid to my charge the death of Captain Le Grange, which I saw in the paper this morning. I had as much to do with the one as the other!

"Was that duel then undertaken in your behalf?" asked Mr. Reynolds, coldly.

"Certainly not!" replied Florence; "all London knows that it arose from a quarrel at écarté."

"Then you had *not* as much to do with the one as with the other," replied her father.

Florence covered her face with her hands.

"I believe that from habits of falsehood, you have almost lost the power of distinguishing the truth," said Mr. Reynolds. "But we have spoken of the past—I have now to address you upon the future."

She listened silently—in terror—she could not depict to herself the future that was to follow such a commencement.

"I will not have my daughter bring public disgrace upon my name, if I can control her propensities," said Mr. Reynolds. "Hear then what I have resolved upon.

I am well aware that men do not make proposals to a woman unless they have received from her an adequate degree of encouragement. The next offer that you receive, I command you to accept, since it will be always in your power by the prudence of your conduct to avoid such overtures from any one that you disapprove: and I will not permit you, while under my protection, to hold out to any man false indications of your favour to be withdrawn at your first capricious change of will. Should you persist in your present unworthy course, I frankly tell you that I will no longer consider you as a daughter, either in affording you present shelter or future support. I will prove to the world that if I cannot restrain your evil propensities, at least I will not afford to them any sort of countenance. You know now on what terms you hold my favour. You will perhaps be cautious how you encourage a suitor whom you must accept when he declares himself, and

whom you must retain when you have once engaged him on pain of incurring my utmost displeasure.

He rose as he spoke, and quitted the room; and Florence remained motionless, overpowered, seated in the same attitude as when he left her, until her maid appeared at the door of the darkened room, and discreetly enquired if Mademoiselle was aware that it wanted only twenty minutes to the hour that the carriage was ordered to be at the door.

She rose mechanically, and dragged herself heavily up stairs; she suffered her maid to attire her without uttering a word; and on returning to the drawing-room she found Mrs. Reynolds, wrapped from head to foot in a great black cashemire, waiting for her to go to the carriage. Mr. Reynolds came in with precisely the grave calmness of his every-day manner, offered his arm to his wife, saw that she was well protected from the chilling air, and conducted her to the carriage.

When they reached their destination, and Mrs. Reynolds threw aside her shawl, Florence was really startled by the splendour of her appearance. She wore one of those gorgeous silk dresses, where a black ground is interwoven with a magnificent pattern of scarlet and gold; her only ornaments were a ruby bracelet of great value and a semi-circle of rubies in her black hair. Perhaps she was a little rouged, for a faint crimson glow was visible on her oval cheek. She must have looked brilliant everywhere; but her entrance into the drawing-room of Sir Ralph Masters was like a fairy vision descending among the guests; for a more ordinary set of people, men and women, could scarcely have been brought together under the sun.

Lady Masters was a gaunt, bony woman of fifty, very tall and very black, with something of a moustache, two or three teeth, and a neck, in form and colour, like a bundle of ropeyarn.

Her grey hair bristled out at the back of her neck, and a brown front was tied across her forehead with a velvet strap. She had a loud voice, and wrung the hands of her visiters in an excruciating manner; Florence did not recover her gripe for some hours.

It so happened that all the ladies were middle-aged, and the gentlemen still more advanced in life. Mrs. Reynolds was petted and fêted, but Florence was nobody; and she would have been shipwrecked, as the Indians call it, when dinner was announced, if an orange-coloured judge, who was escorting a dragoon of a woman in white satin, had not offered her his other arm and helped her down the gilded staircase.

Florence was not a gourmande—she did not care the least for the dinner, which was as splendid as money could procure; all she cared to get was a particular Japanese lily which stood in a golden vase in the centre of the table. The orange-coloured judge was

good-natured enough to reach it for her on the end of a fork, and she amused herself with it while the tedious courses were in progress.

Conversation sped around her, but it was of people, things, and places, of which she had never heard, and never cared to hear. The gentlemen were very attentive to the ladies; but it was not the kind of easy gallantry to which she had been accustomed. There is no end to the shades and gradations which exist in society; and in the circle of Lady Jane Lockwood, the Creswicks, and even the Thomasons, there was a *laisser aller*, a lightness, and even a little touch of literature, which was different from the wealthy and formal circle in which her father seemed to move.

She saw, at a glance, how little such society could do for her—it would neither amuse nor benefit her. She could not marry the orange-coloured judge or any of his compeers. Her only hope was in her former friends. In

their society she might sometimes forget her present position, and perhaps yet meet with a satisfactory proposal.

CHAPTER XI.

Par.—My sister must be prayed for, too—she is desperate, desperate in love!

The Spanish Curate.

"And where may you be going this morning, Master Dick?" said Mr. Scudamore.

This was his invariable question every morning after breakfast; and the invariable answer was, in a tone as if it did not signify at all which way he went,—

"I think I shall ride up to Erlesmede, and just look in at the Warrennes."

Then Mr. Scudamore always smiled at his sister, and she made a face and shrugged her shoulders.

"And I suppose when he has looked in at the Warrennes a little longer," said Mrs. Thorns, "he will make up his mind as to which of the two girls he likes best."

"*Which of the two!*" said Mr. Scudamore, as if that could admit of no doubt whatever.

"I *have* made up my mind," said Captain Scudamore.

"Oh, you have, have you!" said Mrs. Thorns; "then perhaps some day or other you will pluck up a spirit and let the young lady know your intention, or else—here we are at the end of April—time goes so fast that you won't have settled it at all, before you have to go back again. These young men! It was very different when I was a girl! If a man liked you, he told you so, and there was an end of the matter."

"Eh! Dick—what's the difficulty?" said Mr. Scudamore, turning his chair round, so as to gain a view of his son's perplexed face.

"I have not yet found courage to ask her

to share my fortunes; that's all," said Captain Scudamore. "It seems to me a tolerably cool demand for a man to ask any woman to leave a happy home to follow him to an unhealthy climate, involving as it does, so total a separation from her family and friends; but when she is so utterly helpless, so absolutely dependant on those around her for her daily comforts,—

"Why, really Dick," said Mr. Scudamore, unable to keep silence any longer, "if ever there was a woman in this world thoroughly able to help herself under all circumstances, that woman is Maud Warrenne!"

"Maud! it is Alice whom I love!" exclaimed Captain Scudamore.

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Mrs. Thorns.

"Whom I loved from the first moment I saw her!" he added, with vehemence.

Mr. Scudamore sat perfectly silent, stunned by this piece of information. Dick walked up and down the room, and Mrs. Thorns sat rub-

bing her hands, and turning her bright eyes from one to the other.

At last Mr. Scudamore, glancing compassionately at his son, as if he considered him a decided lunatic, and drawing his chair nearer his sister, said to her, in an under tone,—

"But what does the boy mean? He can't mean to marry her!—he can't really be in love, you know, with that poor dear blind doll!"

But if he expected a coadjutor in Mrs. Thorns, he was mistaken — she adored Dick, and would by no means hear of his being thwarted in his choice.

"He shall have which he pleases!" she retorted. "If he likes the little one best, he shall have her. Little and good! What! I suppose every body does not want a tall wife, do they? As Fanny said to John Maitland—'What's the use of your coming here day after day, boreing me about your carriage and your horses, when I tell you that I like your brother

best?' Blind? I never thought she was blind! And if she is, God made her—she did not make herself; You are like the man in the play, who says to his son's friend, 'Here are two ladies; *you* shall choose; only Bob shall choose first!' Dick shall choose, shall he? when you won't let him have the little one!"

From this volley Mr. Scudamore was glad to escape; he did not know what on earth to say: there merely remained in his head a vague idea that a blind woman could not mend her husband's shirts. But he was too distracted to attempt anything like argument on the subject, so after passing his hand over his forehead two or three time, he looked for his hat and stick, and addressing his son who was still disconsolately pacing the room, he said—

"You stop here till I come back. I'm going up to Erlesmede to talk it over, and it will be a good thing if I'm the only one of the party who has made a blunder in the business."

With these words he set off resolutely towards Mr. Warrenne's house, determined to seek an interview with Maud, and have the matter clearly explained. He feared that she might have interpreted his son's constant visits as he had done— he feared that Dick did not know his own mind—he feared that Alice would not return his son's regard; in short, his thoughts had never been in such a tumult since he could recollect. He hardly knew that he had reached the green gate of the Warrenne's garden, till he heard the laughing voice of Maud exclaiming—

"Eh! grandfather! you look as if you had all the cares of the world upon you this morning! All well at the Woodland's? Stop till I undraw the bolt."

She was alone, that was a comfort. She had been gathering China roses from the south wall into her straw hat, which often served her for a flower-basket, and the hand she held out to him was wet with dew.

"Well, but nothing is the matter I hope, grandfather," she said, as she closed the gate behind him.

"Why, Queen Maud, I've made a terrible mistake—I'm almost in despair," replied Mr. Scudamore.

"But that's a pity, grandfather," said Maud; "because *I* have made one or two mistakes in my life, and I should not wonder i papa had done so too, occasionally, when he was young you know; so that you find yourself in good company, and need not grow desperate."

"I don't think I shall ever get over it," said Mr. Scudamore; "I may fairly say that I was never so astonished in my life."

Maud, with her straw hat half full of roses, and holding it by the strings, leaned against the garden gate. Mr. Scudamore, his hands resting on the top of his stick, stood before her. She surveyed him from head to foot with her brightest glance.

"If you had but a cloak thrown over one

shoulder, and a broad-leafed hat, grandfather," said she, "you would look very like the Italian count whose wife and child have just been carried up into the mountains by the bandits! Foot a little more out, and arms folded, I should recommend; but the face is admirable —fit for R- —— Theatre without a single touch of burnt cork!"

"You plague!" said Mr. Scudamore, relaxing into a smile.

"You can't frighten me, grandfather, if you mean that," said Maud. "Alice and papa are both safe in-doors; and I had a letter from Leonard this morming, in high health and spirits, dated Rome."

And diving her finger among the roses, she drew out the letter from the crown of her hat and held it up with an air of triumph.

"You know," said Mr. Scudamore, "what I always thought of you, Maud. You know I always admired you more than anybody in the world."

He was growing serious. Maud, who hated to show emotion, tried to laugh it off.

"Dear me, grandfather, if you were but twenty—thirty—say *forty*, years younger," said she, archly, "how nervous such a declaration would make me!"

"I know what your disposition is," he continued, still more earnestly, "and I should have thought your beauty would have spoken for itself!"

Maud made a little curtsey.

"I am not famous for concealing my thoughts," said Mr. Scudamore, "and *you know* that when my son came over to see me, the only thing wanting to complete my happiness was, that he should make you my daughter."

Maud coloured deep crimson over neck and brow. She could not deny that, however far the idea had been from her own thoughts, she was well aware it was very constantly in his. As soon as she could find her voice, she said—

"Instead of which, dear grandfather, you find that you are obliged to put up with having me for a granddaughter; the thing is not so very different. It is but one step removed."

"I could not love you better," said Mr. Scudamore, looking admiringly at her; "but I'm vexed to death, I acknowledge, I hoped it would have been otherwise—I thought he could not have helped himself."

"And you have been all this time finding it out, grandfather?" said Maud, laughing. "Any other person could not have been five minutes in our company without discovering that we regarded each other merely as very good friends."

"I could not believe it—I could not think it possible;" said Mr. Scudamore, "that he should pass *you* by, and insist like a madman, on marrying poor little Alice!

"Alice!" said Maud, dropping her hat.

"Alice;" replied Mr. Scudamore, distinctly.

There was a very long pause. At last, Maud said in a calm tone, as if matters had grown very desperate indeed,—

"Pick up my roses, please, grandfather."

Mr. Scudamore obeyed. Maud collected the roses in her hand, put on her hat and tied it. Still silent. She could not collect her ideas on the subject. Mr. Scudamore was half afraid she was feeling more than she liked to own. And perhaps, so perverse is the nature of woman on these points, she would rather have had to refuse Captain Scudamore than to find that he had entirely overlooked her in favour of another.

At last she managed to say—"Well, grandfather, what are we going to do next?"

"That's the thing," said Mr. Scudamore.

"You are come to ask my advice, very properly;" remarked Maud, "let us think about it. Does Alice know it?"

"Ah! does she?" said Mr. Scudamore.

"*I* am taken by surprise," said Maud, "she may be so equally."

"She wouldn't think of marrying?" said he, hesitating.

"Oh, goodness, no!" replied Maud, with confidence, "of course not."

"Dick is perfectly frantic," said Mr. Scudamore.

"Foolish," retorted Maud.

"Why, you see, Queen Maud, you don't know what it is yet," said Mr. Scudamore.

"I quite agree with you there," returned Maud. "Nor Alice neither."

"So I thought—so I told Dick;" said Mr. Scudamore, "why she's a child—just out of the nursery."

"Very true, grandfather."

"And then—blind!"

"True again," said Maud, sighing.

"Shall I tell your father?" he asked.

"Certainly; let's have no secrets," replied Maud.

"What I'm to do about Dick, I don't know," said Mr. Scudamore.

Maud was silent. She had some misgivings as to what she was to do about Alice.

"If they have taken a fancy to each other, you know, Queen Maud," said Mr. Scudamore, as they walked towards the house, "why, there's only one thing for it."

"What's that, grandfather?" asked Maud.

"To make the best of it," he returned.

"Oh, that of course," said Maud; "but what else?"

"Why to marry them."

"*Alice* marry!" exclaimed Maud.

"Yes, if Dick has set his heart upon it," replied Mr. Scudamore, with perfect simplicity.

"That does not follow," replied Maud.

"Should not you like him for a brother?" asked Mr. Scudamore.

"Oh! vastly; not so well as Leonard, though," she answered.

Mr. Scudamore began to whistle.

"Why there's papa just going out of the gates," said Maud.

"Then our interview is postponed, and I'm not sorry for it," said Mr. Scudamore; "let's go in and see the child."

"This way, grandfather?" said Maud, pushing open the door.

"Alice, my dear—why, the deuce! Queen Maud, here's Dick!"

"Is there, grandfather?" said Maud, darting past him into the room.

Alice rose all trembling; Maud ran to her, and took her in her arms.

"What on earth brought you here?" asked Mr. Scudamore; "didn't I tell you to stop till I came back?"

"How could I stop?" replied Captain Scudamore.

"When will you learn to do as you are bid?" retorted Maud.

"Come give me your good wishes," said Captain Scudamore.

"With all my heart," said Maud, accepting his offered hand; "and let me tell you, you

have a much quieter bargain than if——" She paused, blushed a little, and turned to Alice.

"She likes the idea of travelling! She will go to India with me! She has not a fear—not a drawback!" exclaimed Captain Scudamore, with the greatest animation, leading his father a little on one side.

"A pretty fellow you are, to turn young ladies' heads in this way," said Mr. Scudamore, highly delighted. Then going up to Alice, he added—

"Alice, my dear love, we must talk it over very prudently. We must not be in a hurry—we must hear what your father says."

"Come, you two go away," said Maud, who saw that Alice trembled more and more every minute, and who did not know what her agitation would come to at last. "Papa is gone out, nd you can do nothing more; and I'm sure nobody wants you here."

"What time will Mr. Warrenne return?" asked Captain Scudamore.

"Seldom much before dinner-time," said Maud. "Come in the evening."

After a good deal of leave-taking, she succeeded in turning out the visiters.

"I wonder whether I'm in my senses," said Maud, who still sitting on the sofa, with her sister's head resting on her shoulder, was carressing the long wild tendrils of her hair. "I declare, a few minutes ago in the garden, I told Mr. Scudamore that it was altogether impossible that you could—you understand—care for Dick; but the moment I came in, and saw your face, I felt it all in a moment. I must have been stupidly blind before."

"Maud," said Alice, in a faint voice, "do you think papa will consent?"

"Why, dear Alice, he will only have one thought in the matter—your happiness—whichever way he determines."

"Then he will consent," said Alice, calmly; "or else I shall die."

Maud looked a little frightened at this

announcement; but presently, thinking it was only the way lovers talked (who were hitherto a perfectly unknown species to her), she recovered her spirits.

"I'll tell you what; as to your going to India it is out of the question," said Maud; "we must keep Dick in England."

"But he must give up everything, if he remains here," said Alice; "that would be too much to ask."

"He *ought* to give up everything for you," said Maud, confidently.

"But how is he to live without his profession?" asked Alice.

"Oh, we must think about that," said Maud; "we can't think of everything at once."

"And you *do* like him, Maud?" said Alice.

"Extremely," replied Maud; "it is only a good thing that I don't like him too much."

"How I am to live till the evening!" said Alice, moving restlessly on the sofa.

Maud, who could no more comprehend her

sister's feelings than if she had expressed them in high Dutch, did her best, however, to relieve them. She offered to read to her, to play to her; she tried to induce her to take up her work. But all in vain. Alice passed a wretched morning; her nervous restlessness growing worse every half hour.

Mr. Warrenne came in just before dinner. He talked but little at dinner-time; but his mind was frequently pre-occupied, and his silence did not seem ominous to the girls.

When the cloth was removed, Alice grew paler and paler, expecting every moment that Captain Scudamore would be announced.

Her suspense was ended, however, by her father coming to sit beside her on the sofa, and saying,—

"Alice, my dear, I had a visit from Captain Scudamore just before dinner, which I would not mention to you, but that I understand you are already acquainted with his preference. It was an ill-advised thing, my dear child, on his

part, to let matters go so far without ascertaining whether it was possible that they could ultimately be brought about."

"Papa!" whispered Alice.

Her shortening breath terrified Maud, who looked imploringly at her father, but he seemed to judge it best to go on.

"You are hardly seventeen, my dear," he pursued, "and in such an important case it is needful that I should decide for you. I have the highest esteem and regard for Captain Scudamore, and had his choice fallen elsewhere (he glanced at Maud), I should have offered no opposition to his wishes. But picture to yourself your desolation in a distant country—strange manners, and a strange language around you, perhaps in circumstances of distress or danger—a helpless condition for any woman, but with your affliction,—nothing could excuse a parent for exposing you to such a chance."

"*With him*—" faltered Alice.

"I have expressed my high opinion of him," said Mr. Warrenne; "but remember, my dear child, that he would not always remain a lover. He would naturally seek amusement in society; the more so as your deprivation would render your's more monotonous than that of most women; you would have the anguish of knowing that his enjoyments were more and more apart from you; and the torture of the completest and most helpless ignorance added to the trials: even in company with him, you would not be able to *see* how he was going on, you would be the prey to a thousand fancies which your judgment would not have the power to correct."

Alice attempted to form some words, but the power of utterance was gone. Her pallor increased, and her breath grew still shorter.

"And then, Alice," continued her father, "in a country where life is proverbially uncertain, I cannot but revert to the possibility of your losing him. In such a case, at a dis-

tance perhaps from any Europeans, your situation would be too frightful. Your means of obtaining information being so limited, you would be utterly without defence or resource. I repeat it, no parent would be justified in exposing his child to such a situation!"

All at once her breath stopped. She fell back in her father's arms. Maud uttered a cry of terror; but Mr. Warrenne, lifting her up gently, said,—

"We had better get her to bed at once, my dear Maud — light me a candle — it has been a very ill-advised proceeding on the part of the young man."

CHAPTER XII.

Pol.—I have a spell against ye, faith and reason:
Ye are too weak to reach me. I have a heart, too,
But not for hawk's meat, lady.

Beaumont and Fletcher.

Per.—You shall prevail
Where it woo my daughter: for it seems
You have been noble towards her.

Shakespeare.

It was impossible for Florence wholly to dislike her mother-in-law, however keenly she might feel her usurpation, for the kind familiarity of her manners, and her attention to the little wants of those around her, made her almost infallibly popular. If Mr. Reynolds had shared this amiable peculiarity of his wife's, he might

have won the affection and confidence of his daughter, but there was a deficiency of quick feeling about him that obscured his better qualities. A little care devoted to the securing for her a few privileges and indulgences might have been well bestowed, and would have much diminished the mortifying sense she entertained of her position in the family. She was excessively fond of riding, and there was no horse provided for her, because Mrs. Reynolds never rode on horse-back; she loved the Opera, and Mr. Reynolds never once thought of taking her, because late hours and crowded assemblies were expressly forbidden to Mrs. Reynolds in her present state of health—for it was generally understood in the household that it was the intention of Mrs. Reynolds some day to add to the somewhat motley junior branches of the family. The heavy and splendid dinner parties, which were the medium by which Mr. Reynolds and his friends enjoyed each others society, usually concluded by half-past ten.

They were entirely composed of ladies and gentlemen of a certain age; there was no music, no flirting; and Florence was always the most insignificant person in the company.

Such was the life which she had led during the month they had passed in town—and already it began to tell upon her health; her dazzling complexion was becoming paler, and she was oppressed by a feeling of *ennui*, to which she had been a comparative stranger, even in the dull retirement of Erlesmede. Mrs. Creswick's letters became now to her a matter of pleasurable anticipation—she had learned the value of her aunt's friendship—she spoke to her with confidence of her own trials and annoyances, and received from her in return both sympathy and advice. She even began, though with some incredulity as to its beneficial effects, to adopt one of her aunt's suggestions with regard to her style of reading. Instead of depending solely on the contents of the circulating library for her mental exer-

cises, she procured, very privately, one or two elementary works on history. Fortunately she had a very wide field before her, since her ignorance was absolutely without limits, and she was gradually becoming aware of the fact. Her father's stern reproofs had not been thrown away upon her—she felt that they were deserved, and, to a certain extent, it became her intention to supply her deficiencies. And well has Dr. Arnold declared that the intellectual is a step to moral improvement. No sooner did she begin systematically to *think*, then it ocurred to her that her life for a long time past had been very base, and, strange as the assertion may appear, her first clear conceptions about the Saxon Heptarchy were a good deal interwoven with reflections upon her own want of integrity and moral dignity of principle. This gradual improvement was, of course, absolutely invisible to those who daily associated with her, and to whom such a change should have been most welcome. To Mr.

Reynolds she appeared, as before, a heartless and ignorant young woman; and to Mrs. Reynolds, "A sweetly pretty creature, who she was quite sure would marry beautifully one day!"

One morning Mrs. Reynolds announced to her that they were going to have a large dinner party that very day, and that she had done herself the pleasure of ordering Florence a blue silk dress for the occasion. It was a remarkably beautiful silk; and Florence, although she was paler than her wont, looked very lovely in it. But, while receiving the compliments of her mother-in-law with all due acknowledgments, she felt that it was a matter of perfect indifference to her how she dressed or looked in such society as that of her father's ordinary guests. She took her seat, therefore, in her accustomed corner, as much out of the way as possible, answered the few salutations that were addressed to her almost without looking up, and fell into a reverie concerning

her studies of the morning until dinner should be announced. She was startled by hearing a voice, perfectly familiar to her, saying to her step-mother—

"You were always out. I began to think you did it on purpose."

"Oh! good gracious, Mr. Reynolds! do you hear what Mr. Courtenay says?" said Mrs. Reynolds, leaning from her arm chair towards her husband; "I, who never deny myself to anybody!"

"Mr. Courtenay is jesting," said Mr. Reynolds, gravely; "he knows that the son of my old friend would be a welcome guest to both of us."

"I want to see your children," said Mr. Courtenay; "Ada writes me that they are very beautiful."

"And you like children?"

"Excessively."

"Goodness! how I shall like to shew you mine! They *are* pretty; but I won't have you

expect too much; your sweet cousin was partial in her account."

Mr. Courtenay's only reply to this remark was an ironical smile which might be interpreted as meaning "Very likely!"

"I am having a miniature painted of my two darlings," said Mrs. Reynolds; "they were so *very* good this morning, their first sitting; did you not think so, dearest Florence?"

"Yes, I was surprised to find them so quiet," said Florence, calmly.

Mr. Courtenay turned and bowed to her. Mr. Reynolds said, with something of hesitation and constraint, which went through her heart, for it looked as if he was ashamed of her—

"Are you acquainted with my daughter, Courtenay?"

"Oh perfectly, an acquaintance of long standing, is it not Miss Reynolds?"

Florence bowed and made no answer. She was determined that her father should not accuse her of flirting with Mr. Courtenay.

"I don't think London agrees with dear Florence, or with any of us," said Mrs. Reynolds, looking up at Courtenay; "I shall be quite glad when we change the air."

"It seems to me one of the foibles of the age to fancy that places don't agree with people," said Mr. Reynolds; "I have no faith in the idea—unless there is something destructive to life in the atmosphere, I imagine that health is very little dependant upon situation."

"It must be a very fragile state of health I should suppose," said Mr. Courtenay to whom the remark was addressed. "I imagine that it is change of scene and not of air, which usually works the cure—but as I am never ill myself I am a bad judge of the influence of climate upon the feelings."

"It is surprising how little gentlemen understand of these things," said Mrs. Reynolds; "now I absolutely expire of a bracing air. I mean to grow young again in Italy!"

"You must grow old first," said Mr. Courtenay, gallantly.

Dinner was announced—the company paired off, and Florence saw no more of Mr. Courtenay till the evening.

She looked for his re-appearance in the drawing room with some degree of curiosity. She *did* think that she had made some little impression upon his flinty feelings—it was provoking to find him meet her with such perfect coolness—she wondered whether he meant to keep it up all the evening—she thought she would—(not flirt with him—oh! no, she had left off flirting), but just see if she could not bring him to his senses. He came in, looked for Mrs. Reynolds, and going straight up to her, asked her to sing. She complied good naturedly, and having tuned her guitar, threw back her clustering black curls and began in her peculiar low sweet voice to chant one of the old Spanish ballads. Courtenay seated beside her, seemed to give

himself up to the music—he begged for another song. Mrs. Reynolds complied; received his praises with a laugh, and handed him her instrument that he might put it away into its case.

The case was close to an ottoman, near which Florence was seated. She opened the lid for him, and said, with something of pique in her voice—

"I hope you have been gratified, Mr. Courtenay."

"Enchanted!" said he, drily; "and you, have you left off music?"

"For the present," said Florence, languidly; "I am tired of it."

"And London does not agree with you?" said Courtenay.

"So Mrs. Reynolds thinks," replied Florence.

"Something does not; for you are looking far from well," he remarked.

"You were always complimentary," retorted Florence.

"I suppose you never get tired of compliments," said Courtenay.

"Certainly not in your company!" said Florence.

Courtenay took a seat beside her.

"And you are not in mourning?" he said

"Mourning—for whom?"

"For Le Grange."

"I think you have sat a little too long after dinner, Mr. Courtenay," retorted Florence. "*I* had no reason to regret the loss of Captain Le Grange."

"True; and if you put on mourning for all your admirers it would come expensive," said Courtenay. "It is surprising how differently people view these little accidents; some with indifference, and some with satisfaction."

"I go no farther than indifference," said

Florence; "I can't pretend to regret the death of so odious a person."

"No; but there's a friend of mine who I know will be delighted at the news. I sent him a paper directly, and told him to feel as Christian as he could about it; but I know his only regret will be that he didn't shoot the fellow himself."

"Indeed! who may that be?"

"Young Warrenne."

"Is it possible? Was he acquainted with Captain Le Grange?"

"He never saw him, I believe."

"And why did he hate the man, then?"

"He thought that Le Grange had not behaved with proper respect to a young lady of his acquaintance."

Florence started and coloured; was it possible that Leonard had thought of her in the matter? It was not likely he could have known that Captain Le Grange had ever

aspired to her hand; so, recovering her voice and complexion, she said, carelessly—

"What young lady, I wonder?"

"Nay, that's too much, Miss Reynolds," said Courtenay, rising; "I can't betray confidence."

"Where is Ada?" said Florence, who did not like to see Courtenay moving off.

"At Weymouth."

"And when does she come back to town? I'm moped to death."

"Not till May. I hope you may last so long."

"I think it very doubtful," replied Florence. "These people will be the end of me."

"Don't you like the orange-coloured Judge?" asked Courtenay; "he is a single man."

"Gracious me! I hope not," exclaimed Florence; for the orange-coloured Judge had taken her to dinner two or three times, and she feared that it might be a preliminary to making himself particularly agreeable.

"Have you forgotten how to say No?" asked Courtenay, laughing at her look of dismay

"Oh! of course not," said Florence; "only I always fancied people of that sort were married."

"I have heard some women declare it was so difficult to refuse a man," said Courtenay, laughing.

"Sometimes," said Florence, thinking of her father's last admonitions as she spoke.

"Under what circumstances?" asked Courtenay.

"I shall not tell you," returned Florence smiling; "I shall leave you to find out."

"I trust that the lady to whom I next declare myself may experience great difficulty in saying No," said Courtenay.

"And I trust she may say it the very first word!" replied Florence, playfully.

"*Nous verrons*," said Courtenay, bowing, as he backed from the sofa.

The visiters were taking leave—Mrs. Reynolds waited until the door closed upon the last, and then exclaimed, her whole face beaming with animation—

"I like him excessively!—I quite dote upon him, my dear Florence, I don't wonder at you. Did you hear what he said of my dear children?"

Florence turned to her mother-in-law with a bewildered air.

"Mrs. Reynolds, you are rather premature," said Mr. Reynolds, looking however with much complacency at his pretty wife; "but I believe we are all of one opinion with respect to Mr. Courtenay. He is a young man whose principles and conduct are so excellent that I confess it would be beyond my hopes if he were to turn his thoughts to—to any one in the present company."

As there was only one person in the company to whom he could with any show of propriety direct his thoughts, Florence blushed,

but said coldly, "that as far as she was concerned she did not join in the flattering opinions just pronounced of Mr. Courtenay, that she imagined him to entertain very undue notions of his own importance; and to be moreover one of the most unamiable persons she had ever seen."

"Oh, Florence! Florence!" said Mrs. Reynolds, archly.

"Your manner to that gentleman this evening did not pass unnoticed;" said Mr. Reynolds, sternly, "and you will permit me to observe that your acquaintance with him is not yet sufficiently intimate to admit of your forming an opinion upon his qualities—which I am glad to know, you have much undervalued."

"I hope he'll call to-morrow with all my heart!" said Mrs. Reynolds, holding out her hand for her candlestick.

Florence was following, when a look from her father arrested her.

"I do not mean to defend pride as a sentiment," he said, "but if any one may be excused for a feeling of self-esteem, it is Mr. Courtenay. Some persons are proud of their ancient birth, and some of having been the founders of their own fortunes—but he has both these causes for self-esteem, since his descent is high, and he has restored the fortunes of his house by his own industry. I confess it would be beyond my most sanguine wishes if—good night, my dear."

With this unusually kind farewell Florence was suffered to retire—a little disturbed at the view her father seemed to entertain of Mr. Courtenay's merits, but consoled when she reflected that of all women in the world she was the least likely to receive an offer of his good gifts.

"He will marry some excessively worthy creature of course," thought Florence, as Louise was undressing her, "very ugly, as those good people invariably are; but he won't

mind that—I never saw a person so careless about beauty; and in my life I never met any one so unmanageable, so perversely self-willed. Marry! I would rather marry poor Captain Le Grange of the two. I should never have a moment's peace as the wife of Mr. Courtenay."

"I am quite disappointed, Mr. Reynolds," said Mrs. Reynolds, when her husband came in to luncheon, "to find that charming Mr. Courtenay has not been to call this morning—I know it is too early as yet, but I thought as I mentioned about the children, he would have dropped in while they were sitting for their pictures, he would have helped to amuse them, little darlings."

Florence raised her eyes from her plate and looked hard at Mrs. Reynolds, to see whether she was in earnest in supposing that Mr. Courtenay would unbend the calm frigidity of his manners for the diversion of her children, who were now eating their cold chicken and mashed

potatoes, at the luncheon table, but she said nothing, and as soon as she had finished her jelly, she left her father and his wife to discuss their plans together.

Mrs. Reynolds soon joined her in the drawing-room.

"We are absolutely alone to-day, my dear Florence—a family party at dinner—a little rest is good for us both my love, for you do begin to look fagged, and *I* am a perfect object!"

"I have no objection to dining alone;" said Florence, who found a space left for her in the conversation, where she was expected to say something.

"You see, my love," pursued Mrs. Reynolds, "that London not agreeing with us, and my health not being now so strong as I hope please God, it will be, I have been talking to Dr. B—— a good deal before luncheon, and he says 'that we can't do better than go to Baden for the summer, and then straight

on to Italy when the weather grows a little chilly.'"

A flash of joy lit up the face of Florence. To Italy! away from all these tedious people—out of reach of Mr. Courtenay whom her father was bent on adoring, and the orange-coloured judge who began to be so very civil,—to Italy, where she might perhaps meet with Leonard, whose image became dearer to her every day, as she contrasted it with the people with whom she was doomed to associate. Oh! why could they not go to Italy at once instead of lingering at a German Spa, when if they delayed, Leonard would be in all probability set forward on his more distant travels.

"And Mr. Reynolds," pursued Mrs. Reynolds, little guessing how fast her hearer's thoughts were voyaging; "Mr. Reynolds, with his usual kindness, subscribes entirely to the wishes of Dr. B——; and only suggests that as I am but delicate, we should leave the two

darlings with Mrs. Creswick during our absence. And here is Mr. Courtenay, I do declare, whom I had absolutely given up!"

"Given up at four o'clock?" said Mr. Courtenay, coming leisurely into the room. "What are your hours?"

"I was thinking of the children," said Mrs. Reynolds; "shall I ring for them?"

"I came to see *Mr.* Reynolds this morning," said Courtenay; "they shewed me into the wrong room."

"*Mr.* Reynolds?" asked Mrs. Reynolds.

"A little matter of business," returned Courtenay.

Mrs. Reynolds rang the bell.

"Shall we see you again?" she asked as the servant appeared to conduct Mr. Courtenay to Mr. Reynolds' study.

"I don't know—if I can," replied Courtenay, bowing to both ladies.

"How you can like that man, Mrs. Rey-

nolds, is a mystery to me," observed Florence, taking up her embroidery.

"Ah, ah!" said Mrs. Reynolds, nodding her head.

"I'm serious," returned Florence.

"Are you really?" said Mrs. Reynolds. "Such a very fine young man; so dignified, and so very well off! I can't believe you, Florence—I really cannot."

Florence made a contemptuous gesture, and applied herself to her work.

In about half an hour Mr. Reynolds came in, took up his station on the hearth-rug, and looked benignantly at his wife and daughter.

He was supremely pleased at something—that was evident; but he seemed to pause a little for words.

"I confess myself deeply gratified by Mr. Courtenay's visit to-day," he said at length; "gratified, and touched by the very flattering terms in which he solicited an alliance with my

family. You have been selected, Florence, by no common person."

"I!" exclaimed Florence, turning as white as her handkerchief.

"Oh! Florence, Florence! after all you said!" cried Mrs. Reynolds.

"It is beyond my hopes," said Mr. Reynolds, looking even more tall and grim than usual; "principle, birth, fortune! I see nothing left to wish for. I need not say that my unqualified consent was warmly given. It strikes me as something remarkable that Mr. Courtenay, endowed with so many advantages, should desire a connection with my daughter. He might have looked higher in every sense, and I trust that, as from circumstances which I am about to mention, the marriage cannot take place till next year, you will employ the intervening time in diligently improving your mind and character."

"One ray of hope seemed to sustain Florence beneath this intelligence. She might meet

Leonard Warrenne in Italy. Nothing could be more vague than her chance of meeting him; for she might be at Pisa, while he was at Naples; and if they met, she might not be able to summon back the feelings which he had once professed for her; but she hoped—she did not stay to reason.

"You share my feelings, Mrs. Reynolds, I am sure," pursued her husband; "you rejoice at this unexpected piece of good fortune. Courtenay dines here to-day."

"I hope so," said Mrs. Reynolds. "Dear Florence, I congratulate you."

"It's rather sudden, isn't it?" she said, passing her hand over her eyes.

"What am I to understand by that remark?" asked Mr. Reynolds, with an expression of great surprise in his countenance.

Florence trembled.

"We go abroad in a fortnight;" pursued Mr. Reynolds; "and Courtenay inform me with regret that it is out of his power to

accompany us. As the marriage could not take place in that time, I am compelled to defer the event until our return.

"Thank Heaven!" thought Florence.

"When Courtenay returns to dinner," added Mr. Reynolds, "I have only to inform him of your acquiescence in the proposal he has done you the honour to make. I told him as much before, but not having then apprised you of the fact, it will require that confirmation Need I say," he added, offering his hand to his daughter, "that I congratulate you, and that I trust you may deserve your good fortune."

The party then dispersed to dress. Florence, alternately hot and cold, was oppressed in turn by fear and indignation. With one slight reservation she had no hope left: she knew her father by this time. And to be won unsought! To be supposed to be grateful for the condescending offer of Mr. Courtenay! She almost longed to see him again, that she

might try to guess by his manner what he could be dreaming about. She was soon gratified in this particular.

Mr. Courtenay entered, as they were all sitting round the fire before dinner, with his usual self-possession, shook hands with the whole party, and then, taking a seat on the sofa beside Mrs. Reynolds, caught up one of the children on his knee, and made room for the other among the sofa cushions, to the great delight of their mother.

It was not until the evening, when the children were gone to bed, and Mrs. Reynolds was making tea, that Mr. Courtenay crossed over to Florence, and drawing his chair quietly close to hers, said, with the most perfect composure—

"I learn from your father, Miss Reynolds, that you have done me the honour to receive favourably the proposals which I made to him this morning."

What would Florence have given to be able

to tell him all she thought of him and his proposals! but although her father was quite on the other side of the room she felt as if his eyes were upon her, and she merely bowed her head.

"Allow me to express to you the sense I entertain of your goodness," said Mr. Courtenay, without in the slightest degree taking the trouble to appear as if he meant it; "and my regret that you leave England so shortly after an arrangement that gives me such entire satisfaction."

Heaven send! thought Florence, that I may be beyond your power before I return.

However, as it was almost necessary for her to make some remark in return for so much civility, she forced herself to say, as he rose to reach her teacup—

"We go abroad in a fortnight."

"Do you like travelling?" he asked.

"I have hardly tried," said Florence; "we were so very quiet you know at Erlesmede."

"What a delightful spot it is; I should like to live there, should not you?"

"No, not much," said Florence, giving back her cup, and sinking into the corner of the sofa.

"I wish that I could spare the time to join you at Rome," said Mr. Courtenay. "You will be absent all the winter I think."

"Yes, I believe so," replied Florence.

"And how do you mean to amuse yourself?"

Florence sighed. Then she began to turn over in her mind how it would be possible to learn from Courtenay what his friend Leonard's plans were; it was difficult to put the question because she felt so conscious. Two or three times she was about to make a beginning, and as often she stopped, fearful lest her manner should betray her interest.

At last, Courtenay who had sat silent for some time, playing with the long silken tassel of a hand-screen that lay on the cushions, looked up suddenly, and said—

"Young Warrenne is in Sicily or you might have happened to meet; one stumbles so oddly upon one's acquaintance in travelling."

The colour flew to her face and then faded away, leaving her so deadly pale, that Mrs. Reynolds, who was passing the sofa, stooped to the ear of her step-daughter and whispered—

"My dear, has he been asking you to name the day?"

CHAPTER XIII.

How like a winter hath my absence been
From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!
What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!
What old December's bareness everywhere;
And yet this time removed was summer time.
Shakespeare.

For several weeks after Captain Scudamore's unsuccessful interview with Mr. Warrenne. Maud was afraid that Alice was going to make good her declaration, and die, for she drooped more and more every day. But there was no wilfulness mingled with her weakness. Her sensibilities were concentrated by her blindness; and, therefore, she was slower than

another in recovering from the shock they had received. And something of the pride that still lingered, very improperly, in the Warrenne family, made her strain every nerve to conceal her sufferings. The idea that any one could think she was dying of love filled her with dismay, and she returned feebly to her family occupations, as if in the hope that their monotony might fill up the blank that Captain Scudamore's absence had made in her life.

Perhaps after the principals, Mrs. Thorns took this disasterous turn of events more to heart than any one else. She several times offered valiantly to accompany the young people to India, if Mr. Warrenne could thereby be induced to trust Alice to Dick's protection. She stipulated, indeed, for Jack Robins, because she was sure that she never could endure to be waited upon by the natives. This proposal not exactly meeting the views of the people concerned, she was now and then tempted to call Alice a "little humbug," and to

insinuate that she was not deceived by persons who set up for being blinder than their neighbours; in testimony whereof she adduced one Jane Cowper, of whom she had heard, though no one else had, that she feigned for some years to be totally deaf and dumb. But in the main she was very sorry for Alice, and thought her father very hard upon her; for, as she remarked, "Not one man in fifty would have taken a fancy to a blind girl, if she *was* blind; and now the poor thing gets an offer, she is not allowed to accept it."

As for Mr. Scudamore, he always held the idea on every subject as long as he could, that "things would come right at last;" and so, though he felt that he could not controvert one of Mr. Warrenne's opinions and arguments on the affair; he saw his son set off for London to make arrangements for his return to India, with the vague presentiment that when he did set sail it would be in company with Alice.

It was a melancholy time for Maud. Her sister's wretchedness was too apparent. It would be better for them all when Dick was fairly gone; there might be some hope then of his being forgotten.

One morning Mr. Scudamore came into the garden by way of the green gate, as usual, and finding Maud at work among the rose trees, made his way towards her.

"How's the child?" he asked, as soon as he came within speaking distance.

This was his regular question now. Maud knit her brow a little.

"Much as usual, grandfather. She is gone to take a little walk with Papa."

"Gone out walking, is she; when will she be back?"

"I don't know," returned Maud, rather abruptly.

She went on gathering her dead roses. Mr. Scudamore paced backwards and forwards, making several sounds of impatience.

"How you do fidget, grandfather!" said Maud, at last.

"I have got something I want to tell the child," said Mr. Scudamore, at last.

This was too much for Maud. Down went her basket and scissors. She stepped into the middle of the path just before Mr. Scudamore, with flashing eyes.

"I tell you what, grandfather, this won't do!" she exclaimed; "if Dick chooses to prefer Alice, it's very well; I've no objection: but if *you* begin to like her better than me—I'll—I'll—I'll not forgive you!"

A hearty peal of laughter was all the reply Mr. Scudamore could make at first to this attack.

"Very pretty, indeed, Mistress Maud," he said, as soon as he could speak. "I shall grow vain in my old age."

"Tell me your news directly, then!" she she said.

"Why, so I would, you vixen," he replied;

"only it happened to concern Alice more than you, and was more likely to interest her."

"What is it, this moment?" urged Maud.

"Why, then, Queen Maud," replied Mr. Scudamore, "Dick, who you know went up to town about his passage, *won't go.*"

She made something like an effort to echo his last words, and stood breathless.

"Not a foot!" continued Mr. Scudamore. "He won't go! While Alice lives, he says he won't leave England!—and I'm glad of it—he retires on his pension—he will stay with me at the Woodlands—we shall manage very well together. Eh?—he loves the child, you see, too well to give her up. I think it is the best thing he could do, for my part!"

Maud was in tears.

"What do you say, Queen Maud? What do you think?" said Mr. Scudamore, as he led her slowly up and down the walk.

"Oh! grandfather, I am so happy!"

"Your father can't refuse her now," said

Mr. Scudamore. "She will almost be under his own roof! What is it to the Woodlands? Not half-a-mile, I do believe!"

It was a remarkably long half-mile; but the precise distance did not signify.

"So you see, Queen Maud," said Mr. Scudamore, "I was right in saying my news concerned Alice more than you."

"Not a bit more," retorted Maud. "Always tell me everything first, grandfather."

"And here they come," said Mr. Scudamore; "and here are Dick's letters. We shall see now whether Mr. Warrenne will withhold his consent!"

Mr. Warrenne's consent was duly forwarded by return of post; and so ended the romantic half of Alice's attachment.

CHAPTER XIV.

Zippa.—What else but that you loved her?
Tortesa. As I love
The thing I give my money for—no more.
Zippa.—You *mean* to love her!
Tortesa. 'Twas not in the bargain.
Zippa.—Why what a monster do you make yourself!
Have you no heart?
Tortesa the Usurer.

Florence was perfectly right in her estimate of Mr. Courtenay's character when she said that it was impossible to find any one more perversely self-willed. But, however little flattered she was by his selection of herself, perhaps she would have been still less so, had she known that it arose entirely from that very

perverseness she so much dreaded. Unable to succeed in gaining the regards of the only woman, who had really touched his heart, he was very careful to go into the opposite extreme, and to choose one for whom it was impossible that he could feel any affection at all. He was far too wise to place his fate in the hands of the capricious Florence, and he had, therefore, without trying to learn her sentiments on his behalf, secured at once the powerful intervention of her father.

He had now to communicate his success to the Thomasons, who had returned from their tour, rather unexpectedly, a few days after his engagement. He breakfasted with them as usual, the morning after their return, and while the ladies were giving him a detailed account of their excursions, Mr. Thomason seemed occupied in glancing over his letters and papers. He looked through two or three business-looking documents, and then breaking the seal of a more aristocratic missive,

scanned it hastily, and then said to his daughter,—

"Another offer, Ada. I am really ashamed of always having to give the same answer. Do try to be more lenient!"

"*Les beaux yeux de ma cassette,*" said Ada, reaching out her hand, not for the letter, but for a plate of fancy bread on the table.

"And what am I to say, my dear?"

"As usual," replied Ada, hardly attending to the question, and turning to ask her cousin for the butter.

"I think, my dear, you might, as he says, give him the opportunity of seeing more of you," remarked Mrs. Thomason, who was, in her turn, reading the letter: "it is hard upon the poor man not to have the chance of making himself acceptable."

"Never take a man upon trial, my dear mamma," said Ada; "they always fancy themselves so furiously ill-used when you turn them off again; don't they, Charles?"

"How should I know?" returned her cousin; "haven't I told you that I should be sure to go about these things differently from other people?"

"And who is the man, after all?" asked Ada, holding out her hand, at last, for the letter, and glancing down at the signature. "'J. Sterling?' I hardly know him by sight! I don't think I meet him anywhere scarcely. I rather hoped it had been Mr. Roxby: to *souffler* him from Mrs. Liversege, would have been rather a triumph. That is the reason I let him dance with me so often on the Wednesday before we left town! Did you observe us, Charles?—for he dances so very badly—quite out of time, you know!"

"Ah! you are all alike, you women," said Mr. Courtenay, drily. "Almost all," he added, after a moment's pause.

"Almost! of course there is some bright exception," said Ada, pouring herself a cup coffee; "a particular star, who has none of the

foibles of her sex, and remarkable fine eyes into the bargain."

"Certainly," he replied, quietly; "you are perfectly correct in your supposition."

"I have thought Charles in love, lately," said Mrs. Thomason, with a sigh.

"Perhaps you were never more mistaken in your life!" said Mr. Courtenay, drily. "I am going to be married, and that is quite enough at one time; no need, I am sure, to be in love also!"

"You, Charles!" cried Ada.

"Myself," he returned, with his usual coolness.

"Well, then, I'm very glad to hear you say so, at last!" exclaimed Mrs. Thomason; "and I've often wondered why you hadn't married over and over again; so much sought as you are in society, and so earnestly as your poor, dear father has begged and prayed of you to do so; and after your poor, dear brother's sad fate, I am sure nobody in the world could

blame him for being a little anxious to see you happily married and settled; and when a young man has enough, and to spare, as you have, if you liked to marry ten wives there could not be the slightest objection! You could afford it, thank God! And all I hope is, Charles, that we shall have no long engagements, but that everything will be put in hand as soon as possible, and then poor, dear Mr. Courtenay will be made happy at last!"

After this incoherent address, Mrs. Thomason wiped her eyes, and took a muffin upon her plate.

"I entirely agree with you, Mrs. Thomason," said Mr. Courtenay, drily. "If I intended to establish myself at Pera, the ten wives would be perfectly *selon les règles*. It is quite impossible to have too much of a good thing; but, as my views are moderate, I relinquish my claim upon the other nine. I also believe that *poor, dear Mr. Courtenay*, is the only person who will be very much de-

lighted with the present arrangement, unless it is the lady's father; but we must recollect that there are marriages which please nobody. Mine will have the advantage of contenting the lookers on. And with regard to long engagements, though I cordially echo your sentiments, and am in a great hurry myself, yet, unhappily, the match cannot come off till next year."

"And who is the lady, Charles?" asked Ada, impatiently.

"Miss Reynolds," returned Courtenay, handing his cup to his cousin. "I don't see why you should keep all the good things to yourself this morning. You may give me some more coffee?"

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Thomason; "why, I never thought you liked her? Surely, Charles—well, its very odd—I suppose I made a mistake."

"I hardly believe he's in earnest," said Ada, looking perplexed.

"It is a very suitable match, and I congratulate you with all my heart," said Mr. Thomason. "Mr. Reynolds is a man of large fortune—his daughter cannot fail to have something handsome."

"Yes; and I want money so much," said Mr. Courtenay, who had received all the remarks on his approaching happiness with exactly the same imperturbable expression of countenance.

"Well, now," I always thought Charles would have married somebody without a shilling," said Ada. "I can't in the least make out his reasons for this match."

"Can't you? Your mamma has given you a whole string of them—enough even for a woman—and in such variety!"

"I don't know. I can't fancy you attached to her," said Ada; "and somehow I don't particularly wish to have Miss Reynolds for a cousin-in-law."

"That is a sufficient plea, I am sure, for

breaking off the affair," said Mr. Courtenay, in a quiet tone.

"Good gracious, my dear Ada, don't let us hear a word against it!" exclaimed Mrs. Thomason, in a great bustle; "here, after all this delay and vexation, Charles has fixed upon somebody at last, and let us keep him to it, if we can. Poor, dear Mr. Courtenay! I only wish we were down in Devonshire now to witness his joy. It must be a great delight to see your only child married. Of course, Charles, you have had time to write to your father and receive his answer? Ada, we call the very first thing on the bride elect, remember."

"I rather wanted Charles to go with me to the British Gallery, this morning," said Ada.

"Nonsense, my dear, exclaimed Mrs. Thomason. "You must not expect your cousin to be at your beck and call now that he is going to be married; you must find somebody in your turn."

"I'll escort you, with all my heart," said Mr. Courtenay, quickly; "why shouldn't we go?"

"Indeed, I won't hear of it," cried Mrs. Thomason. "It would be a great want of respect to Miss Reynolds to be flourishing about with another young lady, even though she is your cousin. I often think," she added, with a deep sigh, "that the world is coming to an end!"

"I'm sure we won't hasten the catastrophe," said Mr. Courtenay, taking up his hat. "But never mind, Ada, we will defer our visit to the Gallery for a few days, and then the coast will be clear, for Miss Reynolds will be out of England."

So the Thomasons went to leave their cards upon Miss Reynolds, for she was out driving with her step-mother, and then returned to see their own company.

"It is a wonder to me," said Ada, seated near the bow-window in the inner drawing-

room, with a book half-closed in her lap, "how any body can go about making calls such a delicious day as this. If I had my own way mamma, I should be in Richmond Park, lunching under the trees.

The remark could not be called personal for there was nobody then in the room but Sir Frederic Manning, who often dropped in of a morning, and went wandering about the room, without taking much notice of anybody.

"Ah! my dear," sighed Mrs. Thomason, "when you know the world a little better, you will learn the claims that society has on your time. People can't spend their lives in Richmond Park."

Ada did not reply. The muslin curtains swung to and fro in the breeze, and the branches of the creepers, which were trained against the windows, floated backwards and forwards.

At last Sir Frederic came in front of Ada's

chair, and standing still, with his arms folded, looked down upon her attentively.

"Clever fellow that cousin of yours," he said.

"Charles? Oh, very," replied Ada.

"If he chose that attitude, he ought to have been a sculptor," said Sir Frederic, pointing to the statue of Ruth.

"He had something to do with it," returned Ada. "He made W—— alter the left arm, which was a little raised; the hand is now on the ground."

"I see; very good—very right," said Sir Frederic; "that left hand and arm I think equal to anything in modern sculpture."

"Do you?" returned Ada, carelessly. "I'm tired of it now. I liked it very much at first—the statue altogether, I mean."

"It only shows now what prejudices govern society," said Sir Frederic; "here is this statue, which I admire solely as a work of art, entirely as a beautiful piece of sculpture, and

yet if I were to ask permission to have a copy made of it, I should be looked upon as a madman—it would be a thing unheard of."

Mrs. Thomason had gone out of the room for some fresh worsteds—Ada had to answer the question herself.

"Because," she said, speaking with some effort, "though to you it is merely a good statue, other people would recollect it was the portrait of an individual."

"That's the point," said Sir Frederic. "'Other people' often stand in the way of our wishes—and it is singular that we should defer so much to the opinions of those who, though they have the power to make us uncomfortable, have neither the power nor the will to make us happy!"

"I am sure," said Ada, trying to laugh, "that were it not for those same 'other people,' papa would gladly oblige you in this particular. He is not fond enough of works of art to be stingy of them."

"Well," said Sir Frederic, looking round and perceiving that Mrs. Thomason had disappeared, "I start for Rome to-morrow morning—oblige me by making my adieux to Mrs. Thomason."

Ada could hardly echo the words "for Rome?" before he had made his parting bow, and his step was heard rapidly descending the stairs.

He had succeeded in convincing her of his perfect indifference, at any rate. It almost seemed as if his visit had no other aim. She tried to reason with herself for a little while and then stooping her head on her hands, she gave way to a perfect shower of tears.

"Eh? what's the matter now?" said the voice of her cousin, after she had employed a few minutes in this manner.

"Nothing; don't bore me, Charles. I'm only low," said Ada, raising her head.

"Only low," repeated her cousin; "you are surrounded by luxury and indulgence—

you have health and youth — your parents idolize you — and because you are troubled with a passing headache, or put out in some trifling scheme of amusement, you give way to tears, and talk of being *low!* But this is the way with women! I thank heaven there is no woman living whose tears could influence *me.* I know what they are worth."

Ada's flowed faster at this exordium. Courtenay stood beside her, looking uneasy.

"Yet, if you have any cause of distress, (which you can't have)," he added, drawing a chair quickly beside hers, and seating himself, "you know how gladly I would exert myself in your behalf."

Ada put her hand into his, and struggled to subdue her emotion. He sat beside her quietly waiting till she should be able to explain herself.

"You see, Charles—" she began; then after a pause she added hastily—

"What *was* the prejudice Sir Frederic had taken against me?"

"Oh, Sir Frederic!" returned Mr. Courtenay, as if entirely enlightened as to the cause of her tears. "I don't in the least know to what you refer."

"At our ball in the winter—it was you who told me," exclaimed Ada.

Mr. Courtenay remained holding his chin for a moment; then recalling the circumstance, he replied—

"Ah! he said he would never dance with a woman of fortune again, that was it; and so I could not with propriety introduce you to him as a partner."

"That was very absurd," exclaimed Ada.

"Excessively," returned her cousin.

"He has been here very often, Charles, since then," murmured Ada, breaking afresh into sobs.

"Has he? so much the worse," said Courtenay.

"And now he says he is going to Rome," added Ada, almost inaudibly.

"So much the better," returned her cousin.

"What have you to say against him?" asked Ada, looking up suddenly.

"Everything," said Mr. Courtenay.

"I don't believe a word of it!" cried Ada, indignantly.

"Then I need not trouble myself to go into detail," said Mr. Courtenay, with perfect coolness.

"No," replied Ada, starting from her chair, "for I am going directly to papa to beg him to accept Mr. Sterling, if he has not already written."

Ada was in a passion.

"By all means," said her cousin, looking after her as she flew from the room, "since the refusal went three hours ago."

"Where's Ada?" asked Mrs. Thomason as she entered.

"Gone off in a rage," he replied.

"No!" exclaimed that lady, sinking into her chair.

"Fact," replied Courtenay, walking to the window.

"Charles, I want to speak to you seriously," said Mrs. Thomason.

"Eh?" said he, coming up to her.

"I have been puzzling for a long time about Ada," said Mrs. Thomason; "it is so very odd her refusing every offer that is made her, one after the other in this way, now is it not, Charles?"

"Very singular," he replied.

"Do you know I half fancied that you were the cause of it," pursued Mrs. Thomason, "and it made me very uneasy."

Mr. Courtenay bowed.

"Of course I mean, Charles, because you are cousins, and because you did not seem to think of Ada; I could have no other objection you know."

Mr. Courtenay bowed again.

"But I watched her when you announced your engagement—I am sure I have not half congratulated you yet—and I saw that she did not take it in that light."

"Ah!" said he.

"Well now, Charles, tell me candidly what you think of Sir Frederic Manning."

"My dear aunt, he is one of those inconvenient people who possess a kind heart and a bad head."

"And did not somebody tell us he was in difficulties?" pursued Mrs. Thomason.

"They told you very true," said Mr. Courtenay; "his estate is mortgaged to a terrible extent."

"Then I'll tell you what, Charles," said Mrs. Thomason, with an air of great sagacity, "he will not do for Ada; and I shall take very good care not to be at home when he calls, nor to send him any invitations to our parties —eh?"

"You could not do better, my dear Mrs.

Thomason," replied Mr. Courtenay gravely; "and as you are fond of proverbs I can give you one that is very applicable to the present occasion—'When the steed is stolen, shut the stable-door.'"

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